Mushrooms, Myth & Mithras

THE DRUG CULT THAT CIVILIZED EUROPE

Carl A. P. Ruck, Mark A. Hoffman,
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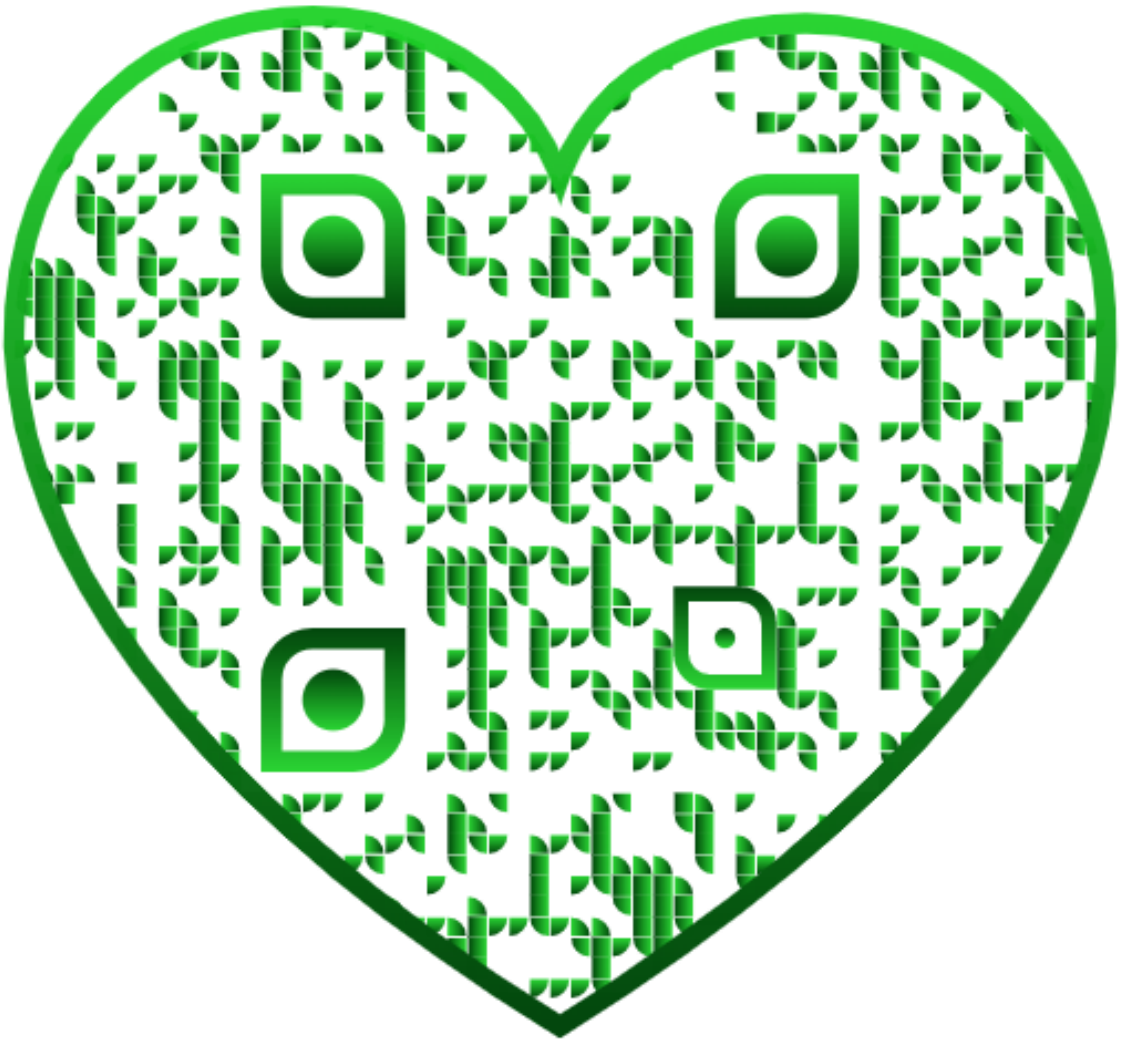

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Nothing is so great, nothing else is greater than the Bull that carries Heaven and Earth. Like a shaft he pierces through the Earth's habitation and strews living beings as the Wind strews the clouds; decked out like Varuna and Mitra, he causes light to stream forth from the forest.

—*Rig Veda* 10.31

Prelude

The First Supper: Entheogens and the Origin of Religion

> Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, provided madness is given us by way of divine gift.
>
> —Socrates, *Phaedrus*

Various traditions recall the events of a "First Supper." In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the story unfolds in a garden called Eden. In that version of the myth, a serpent persuades humans to eat the fruit of a sacred Tree of Knowledge, thus bringing man and God together. In the patriarchal reformation of Judaism, with its morbid dread of the power of the goddess, the story of the First Supper was revised. But even there, the jealous god observes that the food made humans more like Himself, endowed with knowledge of good and evil and the wisdom of the angels.

Such substances are now termed *entheogens*. Combining the ancient Greek adjective *entheos* ("inspired, animated with deity") and the verbal root in *genesis* ("becoming"), it signifies "something that causes the divine to reside within one." When used in rituals, entheogens can be seen as sacramental substances whose ingestion provides a communion and shared existence between the human and the divine. In the context of ceremony and ritual, the individual becomes "at one with God."

Prior to the recent revival of interest in psychoactive plants and compounds, the need for a new word for these botanical mediators led psychiatrist Humphry Osmond to coin the term *psychedelic*, "to fathom Hell or soar angelic," as he described it in a letter to Aldous Huxley. Within just a few years, however, conservative backlash against the 1960s counterculture had contaminated the word with the perception of

criminality, recklessness, and abuse. The term was derived from the Greek words *psyche*, for the "human mind, soul or spirit," and *delos*, "clear, manifest." In fact, early experimentation with such substances in the modern West suggested similarity with psychotic states, as implied in the coinage of *psychomimetic* and *psychotropic*.

An entheogen is any substance that, when ingested, catalyzes or generates an altered state of consciousness that is deemed to have spiritual significance. Symbolic surrogates, lacking the appropriate chemistry of psychoactive plants and compounds, may induce a similar experience through cultural indoctrination and suggestion or personal subjectivity, and could also be termed entheogens. Like shamanism itself, entheogenic spirituality is dependent upon and defined by the states of consciousness experienced. In many cultures, accessing such states is considered culturally essential to the perpetuation of a society's underlying natural and spiritual interconnection with the cosmos. Altered states of consciousness are very often considered in dispensable to such core shamanic practices as diagnosis of ailments, curing, soul retrieval, and communication with deceased ancestors.

In myth, transformations of consciousness are an integral element in the basic story of the hero or heroine who encounters pathways of communication between the human and an otherwise invisible realm, and such experiences are viewed as part of the ongoing renewal of the community's spiritual well-being. These transformations even underlie the semishamanic philosophies of *Gnosis* in the ancient Classical world. Among other peoples, they ensure perpetual contact with the wisdom and benevolence of the spiritual worlds.

Generally speaking, however, the study of entheogens is a comparatively recent phenomenon, as is their recognition as a formative influence on the shaping of both shamanic and so-called developed cultures. It is now widely accepted among specialists that entheogens and the ethnopharmacology of their plant sources represent one of the most direct, powerful, reliable, and indeed ancient means of inducing "authentic" shamanic states of consciousness. Entheogens may, in fact, be the most reliable way of inducing a profound and sustained alteration of consciousness commonly associated with ecstatic, shamanic states. Hence

they are at the heart of such dependable and repeatable ceremonies as initiation rituals and other religious Mysteries.

When entheogens are taken in the context of a society's sacred shamanic ceremonies, the culture's mythopoetic traditions are often relived and reinfused with profound immediacy and power, heightening their spiritual sense of connection.

Entheogenic epiphany is commonly described as a state in which people experience their individual distinctions dissolve in a mystical, consubstantial communion with a force of profound sacred meaning. This ecstatic experience is interpreted as a pure and primal consciousness and sometimes described as the direct contact with the unobscured root of being. Since shamanic spirituality is inherently practical, it ascribes the highest importance to the regular access to such transcendental states; this point of contact ensures the undisturbed continuation of natural cycles and helps perpetually maintain a society's underlying sense of centeredness, equilibrium, and balance. From a shamanic perspective, ecstatic contact also protects against the potential dangers of unappeased or neglected gods or spirits. The entheogenic experience, though entirely strange, dissimilar, and inexplicable in mundane language, is often described as feeling more real and vibrant than ordinary consciousness.

Some of the plants used for shamanic rituals have yielded important medicines, for shamans are traditional healers, often called "wise ones." Other substances open up pathways to otherwise unseen worlds, with the spirit of the plant as guide to repair the invisible imbalance that is the cause of disease and plague. The word *medicine* has cognates in all the Indo-European languages and is related to *meditate* and *middle*, implying the doctor's original role as an entranced mediator.

Most probably derived from the Middle Dutch term *droge vate* ("dry vat"), the plants and substances employed were eventually called "drogues" in Middle English because they were usually dry when found in the apothecaries, which were also shops for poisons. The word was applied to narcotics and opiates toward the end of the nineteenth century. This has given "drug" an unfortunate pejorative connotation that dominant religious groups often use to describe substances used by other spiritual communities. Similarly pejorative is the reference to entheogenic experience as "hallucinatory," which once meant "dreamlike wandering,"

but it has come to imply delusion and disconnection from reality rather than a heightened access to it.

Fossils show that approximately 1.5 million years ago, a sudden and scientifically baffling development in the proto-human neocortex emerged. It has been speculated that the explosion in brain size, the prerequisite for the evolution of modern humans, occurred when our hominid ancestors began to intentionally and regularly consume consciousness-altering foods. Such an important adaptive aid would have been well suited to our "trickster" disposition for creative thinking. Thus, in keeping with the myths of old, we suggest that perhaps our species did indeed first become truly human when we first ate of those sacred Eucharistic foods—initially by individuals, and then ritualistically in groups, in what can be seen as First Suppers.

Early humanity has left compelling testimonies of its entheogenic traditions in the archaeological record. In the Shanidar cave in Iraq, there is evidence that approximately 60,000 years ago Neanderthal culture had specialized knowledge of medicinal plants and incorporated them in the burial of an apparent shaman leader.

Today shamanism is recognized as the primal and universal belief system reaching back to deepest antiquity, a practice that survives intact in many cultures around the world. Its influence on the historical emergence of Western civilization, however, has been all but ignored. Historians of Europe's debt to the Greco-Roman tradition have been largely blind to it in their own backyard, apart from admit ting, for instance, that the Druids may have been shamans and that shamanism was the likely archaic, animistic religion of Paleolithic "Old Europe." Even less of a shamanic provenance is ascribed to the Classical tradition, that great fountainhead of Western civilization.

Nevertheless, there were shamans in ancient Greece and Rome, and ongoing research continues to ascribe central entheogenic elements to the most historically important and influential ancient religious rites. At first it was assumed that shamanic techniques were a foreign importation imitated by those peoples along the shores of the Black Sea in the regions of Scythia and Thrace who, in turn, would have adopted the practices from their neighbors, the Tungus people of Siberia. It was there among the Siberian

tribes that shamanism was first recognized and described by Western scholarship as a priestly practice.

As early as the sixth century BCE, various Greeks are described as having magically traveled to the mythological lands of the Hyperboreans, who dwelled beyond the North Wind. Using innovative means such as the toxins of their arrows or by metamorphosis into birds, they made the journey in order to visit the god Apollo while their bodies appeared lifeless. Upon returning, these Greek priestesses and priests were believed to have the ability to banish plagues and predict earthquakes. One of these travelers is credited as the founder of Apollo's great sanctuary at Delphi. Here the god's entranced prophet was consulted even by the leaders of nations, her unquestionable validity being such that Socrates devoted his life to fathoming the meaning of her famous ironic declaration that he who knew only that he knew nothing was the wisest man in Athens. What else could one call this world-renowned priestess but a shaman? Nor was she alone; the experiences and beliefs of many important philosophers (as well as other very influential Greeks and Romans) qualify them as shamans. For example, the great mathematician Pythagoras, who lived in southern Italy, established a religious community devoted to dietary and spiritual practices, including the descent into caves that would induce the vision of the underlying mathematical relationships upon which this world of appearances is based.

We have an eyewitness to the shamanism of Pythagoras's contemporary Empedocles, as well as his entheogenic claims. Empedocles declared that he knew of all the drugs and could teach them to his initiates, for he had drunk fire from an "immortal potion" and could now calm or summon storms at his will and lead the souls of the deceased back up from Hades, the realm of the afterlife.

Such shamanic prowess is also described among the Gnostic Orphic religious communities, who claimed that their founder had a unique dietary regime and a special ecstatic "smoke" (probably referring to the inhalation of sacred incense). Orpheus, a priest of the Hyperborean Apollo, could summon beasts and was apparently considered an incarnation of his god since, upon death, he was compounded into an inebriating potion by his ecstatic female devotees while his disembodied head continued to prophesy. His devotees believed that the body (*soma*) was a tomb (*sema*), that this life

was a deathlike incarnation of the soul that would be liberated upon death (as it is temporarily during ecstatic trances), judged and recycled through an astrological-planetary curriculum before reincarnating for a series of further trials on Earth. This process continues until the soul finally achieves "perfection," a condition described as a kind of a celestial actualization.

This basic shamanic idea of a detachable soul limited to Orphic doctrine underlies the literature of the Classical Age, where the soul is considered most alert and free in sleep, dreams, and trances, where it can acquire some of the knowledge it will attain upon the final liberation of death. This redemptive theology is consistent with the metaphysics of Empedocles and many other ancient models, including that of Roman Mithraism considered in the present work.

Parmenides gave an account of his soul's journey to the gateway between night and day, where he met a goddess who imparted her teaching of the Gnostic Vision. He was said to have produced the laws of his city after a vision quest in a cave. He and Pythagoras were not alone in achieving visionary knowledge.

Plato explicitly claims that his dialogues are just the preparation for a vision of the Ideal or archetype of reality that only comes after an extended regime of spiritual practices, for which he employed the famous metaphor of the Cave and a Mystery initiation. Plato, like Aristotle after him, was initiated into the venerable entheogenic Mysteries of Eleusis, the experience of which certainly colored his model of a visionary community, and the resulting revelation is thought to have deeply influenced his Doctrine of Forms.

Thus entheogenic shamanism is also at the heart of what we have come to call Greek philosophy. Sophists and philosophers were probably all shaman priests, at least in the common mind; a sophist, after all, is nothing other than a *sabio* or *sabia*. It was from such a "wise-woman," the famous Diotima, who was also adept at banishing plagues, that Socrates learned the metaphysical nature of love that he expounds in the *Symposium*. Aristophanes parodied Socrates as a sophist-shaman, first in *Clouds*, where his community of disciples was shown digging up special roots in a profanation of a Mystery initiation and hallucinating on clouds of cannabis smoke. And later, after the actual scandal of the Profanations, when certain prominent Athenians were discovered to have used the Eleusinian potion

for recreational purposes at their drinking parties, he was shown in *Birds* again profaning the Mystery in a shamanic rite of necromancy as he summoned up spirits of the dead through the medium of an entranced companion.

As is clear from the monastic communities of "wisemen" like Pythagoras, Plato, and the Orphics, shamanism came to be practiced as a group experience. The great Eleusinian Mystery was of this type, a shamanic initiation in which participants journeyed the other world in order to experience personally the opened pathway between the realms. The psychoactive agent for the mixed potion or *kykeon* was derived from ergot, a fungus that grows on grains. The Mystery was enacted for nearly two millennia and most of the greatest personages of the Greco-Roman world were initiated. Cicero testified that it was the paramount contribution of Athens to the civilized world. The Eleusinian ceremony was only the best known of similar Mysteries, like that of the Kabeiroi, enacted at various other sites.

Such communal shamanism was also the basis of the maenadism of the female devotees of Dionysus. Periodically the women of the city deserted their homes for a mountain revel where they enacted herbalist rituals and induced a rapture that has become the touchstone example of ecstasy. The men induced something similar in the drinking parties or *symposia*, where the wine was fortified with consciousness-altering additives.

Dionysus's most enduring gift was his patronage of the theater. Drama began as a shamanic experience, with an entranced narrator evoking the spirit of a deceased ancestor from his tomb to impersonate his story. As it developed in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE in Athens, it became a communal experience of shamanic possession spreading from the actors outward to the surrounding audience. To place them in the properly receptive mind, a special vinous potion was offered throughout the several days of performances. The great playwrights themselves appear to have composed their dramas in a state of shamanic trance and possession.

The Indian and Persian Soma rites, moreover, persisted among the early Indo-European immigrants to Mesopotamia and were assimilated by Semitic and other peoples, elements being incorporated into ancient Judaism and the Egyptian Mysteries.

By the Hellenistic period, similar and derivative entheogenic rituals were well established among spiritual communities like the Therapeutai, a mystical Jewish group with such pronounced similarities to Christianity that they were once thought to be the earliest documented monastic community of the sect. From the shores of the Dead Sea, the Essene brotherhood is another group that influenced early Christian practice, being exposed to the trade routes with the Orient that facilitated the mingling of ideas between the great civilizations of Eurasia. The Persian Magi were visitors to many ancient cities, performing their shamanic rites from the Athenian marketplace to ancient Judea and beyond. Moreover, port cities like the Peiraieus of Athens and Roman Ostia had multiethnic populaces with sanctuaries of their foreign rites.

Journeying in the opposite direction, the shaman Apollonius of Tyana, a contemporary of Jesus and also declared a god, was actually initiated into a Soma rite by Brahmans in India. The Christian version of the rite was suppressed by the dominant Church or reserved for its elite, but it persisted at least as late as the seventeenth century in various Gnostic sects, notably among the followers of Mani in the East, condemned as heretical although even in Europe Manichaeism and occult Mysteries like alchemy persisted or were repeatedly reintroduced by travelers from the Holy Lands of the Middle East.

Thus, as we can see even from this cursory treatment, many of the most significant developments of Western culture were inspired by a central spiritual, ecstatic impetus that most often, if not always, included access to altered states through the use of entheogens. As Plato eloquently documented, “Our greatest blessings come to us by way of madness, provided madness is given us by way of divine gift.”

It is in this vein that we now consider the lasting significance of the entheogenic Mithraic tradition as it existed—and persisted—throughout Eurasia, how the Roman Army adapted and brought the older Vedic and Persian traditions with them into Europe, as well as the “civilizing” influence it has had even into the modern epoch.

Also Sprach Zarathustra

When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lake of his home, and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude, and for ten years did not weary of it. But at last his heart changed —and, rising one morning with the rosy dawn, he went before the sun, and spake thus unto it:

> Thou great star! What would be thy happiness if thou hadst not those for whom thou shinest! For ten years hast thou climbed hither unto my cave: thou wouldst have wearied of thy light and of the journey, had it not been for me, mine eagle and my serpent.
>
> Lo! I am weary of my wisdom, like the bee that hath gathered too much honey; I need hands outstretched to take it. I would fain bestow and distribute, until the wise have once more become joyous in their folly, and the poor happy in their riches.
>
> Therefore must I descend into the deep: as thou doest in the evenings, when thou goest behind the sea, and givest light also to the netherworld, thou exuberant star!
>
> Bless the cup that is about to overflow, that the water may flow golden out of it, and carry everywhere the reflection of thy bliss! Lo! This cup is again going to empty itself, and Zarathustra is again going to be a man.
>
> Thus began Zarathustra's down-going.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, Zarathustra's Prologue, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Richard Strauss's symphonic poem, Opus 30, 1896, was inspired by Nietzsche's lyric parable of the quasi-mythical Persian prophet known to

the Greeks as Zoroaster, a possible contemporary of Moses and the heretical pharaoh Akenaten. The music's ecstatic "Dawn Fanfare" was used in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

That is all that most people know about a religion that arose in what is now Iran some 3,000 to 3,500 years ago. Zarathustra's belief in a single solar god, Ahura Mazda, became the religion of Persia until the Arabic Muslims invaded in 650 CE, and the Zoroastrians, for the most part, fled. Today they are reduced to some 200,000 adherents, mostly located in India, although a few have established themselves in Australia, the United States, and elsewhere. Reluctant to proselytize in general and specifically forbidden in their former homeland and most Muslim countries, they maintain a low profile in the modern world. Zoroastrians worship the Sun and the purifying power of fire, with little awareness, at least in public, of their own ancient traditions. In India, mostly in Bombay, they are known as Parsis (or Farsis), which simply means Persians; in their former Iranian homeland, they are called Gabars, which means "infidels." Zoroastrianism also survived in medieval alchemical symbolism, and its traditions even fused with Islam in the mystical Muslim theology of the Sufis.

Zarathustra may have invented monotheism, or he was, at least, probably its earliest proponent. Although often dated to the seventh century BCE, estimates sometimes place him almost a millennium earlier, foreshadowing Judaism and the solar cult of the Egyptian pharaoh Akenaten, a tradition that continued into Christianity and Islam. Akenaten reduced the other deities to aspects of the One God, reforming a still older religion of opposed forces of light and darkness, goodness and evil.

In the reformed religion, Mithras, who was originally one of the four great deities, became an intermediary with the One God, much like Christ with the Father. The original religion was very much older; it was the religion of the Magi, shaman sorcerers, that the Persians brought home with them from the steppes of Central Asia. It was closely related to the religion of the Aryan invaders of India. Thus the earliest texts of Zoroastrianism and those of Hinduism show an extraordinary similarity of language and ideas.

Its sacred text is the *Vendidad*. The oldest part of it is a collection of hymns called the *Gathas*, some supposedly written by Zarathustra himself. Over the course of millennia, other texts were added. The entire scripture is called the *Avesta*, to which commentaries known as the *Zand* were added,

so that the entire sacred text is called the *Zand Avesta*. The various texts were transmitted orally and were probably codified and finally preserved in the palace library of the Persian Darius and the Achaemenid dynasty (648–330 BCE). The Persian *Avesta* is comparable to the Sanskrit *Rig Veda*, a sacred text of Hinduism that originated roughly at the same time and was preserved orally until it was finally recorded in writing in Late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages.

The reformed theology was not so much a battle between good and evil as an evocation of the higher potential within man (what Nietzsche termed the *Übermensche* or Superior Man) by a battle fought by conflicting interests within each individual's soul, although Nietzsche's interpretation was directed toward the liberation of man from all forms of theological hypocrisy.

The earlier belief in a cosmic struggle, however, never died out. The basic dualism of the universe surfaced in the medieval Albigensian Cathar Christian heresy in Provence and the Pyrénées, as well as the Bogamils of Bulgaria and Bosnia, the latter probably influenced directly by Persian sources. Even earlier dualism was involved in the numerous Gnostic sects of Christianity, among them Manichaeism, which derived from one of Zoroastrianism's last prophets, Mani, who saw himself as a follower of Christ and, typical of the syncretism of the ancient world, combined ideas from Buddhism and other central Asian religions.

A version of the Persian religion became popular in the Roman Empire from the first century BCE, centered upon Mithras, who is almost indistinguishable from the Greek hero Perseus. (The former slaughtered a bull, while the latter is known for decapitating the Gorgon Medusa.) Mithraism became one of the dominant religions of the Roman Empire. Although derived from the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenid monarchs, it had assimilated many additional elements as it passed through the Middle East, including certain astrological metaphors and incorporating the latest discoveries in astronomy. It also absorbed the symbolism of the agricultural fertility cults of Mesopotamia, although its most ancient cultural roots pertained to nomadic hunter peoples of the Asiatic steppes. Nevertheless, even before its advent to the West, many prominent guests of the Persian elite were apparently offered an opportunity to be initiated into something that seems very similar to the Greco-Roman version, and even in its Persian

original, it was a brotherhood of warriors cemented by a visionary Eucharist.

Mithraism initiated its members through seven stages of transcendence, culminating with an ecstatic vision in which one journeyed into a sacred realm where one experienced the entire pattern of the Universe, an experience that was expressed in the prevalent Roman philosophical system known as Stoicism.

Mithraism was a fierce competitor with Christianity, as was the more ancient Mystery religion of Eleusis. With the conversion of the Roman Empire under Constantine and the subsequent persecutions by Theodosius, the sanctuaries where the secret Mithras rituals were practiced were demolished. The Church fathers were well aware of the similarities between the two religions, and they desperately argued that Satan must have had advanced knowledge of the coming of Christ and preemptively mocked the Christian rites. Indeed, as the earlier of these popular Roman religions, Mithraism had a wide and formative influence upon the fledging Christian cult. Despite the loss of Imperial patronage, the fall of the Roman Empire, and the best efforts of the Church Triumphant to relegate it to oblivion, Mithraic traditions survived and even thrived in the esoteric undercurrents of Western civilization, and they do so to this day.

It is essential for our understanding of the Classical heritage of ancient Greece and the spread of Greco-Roman culture to Europe to come to terms with the fact that Western civilization was profoundly influenced by a secret spiritual practice that revolved around the use of entheogenic plants and mushrooms to usher transcendent states of consciousness.

one

The Entheogenic Eucharist of Mithras

The Foundation of Empire

In ancient Rome and throughout most of its vast empire which stretched from Asia Minor and northern Africa to the British Isle, starting sometime around what would come to be known as the Christian era and lasting until the triumph of the Church Dominant, elite groups of twenty to thirty men gathered in small, vaulted, windowless chambers decorated with religious frescoes and stone carvings to celebrate their god Mithras.[1]

There they initiated new members into their secretive religion with a sacramental meal that the Christians considered the equivalent of their own Eucharist. Membership was exclusively male,[2] and included soldiers, merchants, and officials of the highest bureaucratic levels of government; even emperors such as Nero, Diocletian, and Julian were initiated. The Mithraic rites must have played an essential role in forming social bonds that united the men of the Roman army, and hence it was fundamental to the Roman Empire's political and military power structure.

Nero was apparently the first Roman emperor to be initiated with entheogens, i.e., a "magical dinner" (*cenis magicis*)[3] in 66 CE when Tiridates I, the newly proclaimed Roman-sponsored king of Armenia, traveled overland to Rome. He refused, as a scruple of his religion, to pollute the sacred element of water by a naval voyage, instead traveling accompanied by his Magi priests and 3,000 Parthian horsemen. (This is about the same time that the Gospel of Matthew recorded the journey of the three Magi to Jerusalem to authenticate the divinity of the Hebrew infant, Jesus.) Upon the king's triumphant entry into the city, he declared to Nero that he had come to offer himself as a worshipful slave to his divinity as the incarnation of the god Mithras.

For the festivities in honor of Tiridates, a purple awning was stretched over the Theater of Pompey in the Campus Martius, on which Nero was depicted in a sun-chariot surrounded by golden stars. He also installed an enormous statue of himself in his Golden House as the Sun God. What is surprising is that even though the Mithraic initiation was always a banqueting ceremony, no one bothered to inquire as to what Tiridates served Nero.

> The Zoroastrian magus Tiridates came to celebrate Nero's conquest over Armenia, and he brought with him other magi. And he even went so far as to initiate the Emperor in the repasts of the craft, but even though he had received a kingdom from him, he wasn't able to make Nero a magus.
>
> —Pliny, *Natural History*, 3.6.

In Pliny's opinion, Nero's initiation was not a success. He cynically speculates that even though Nero found nothing more gratifying than sacrificing humans in order to attain the art of the Magi, the failure may have been due to his freckles! He was not a perfect physical specimen, despite his flaming red hair. The citation must be taken seriously, however prejudiced and garbled, because it offers invaluable evidence about the emperor's initiation. It is clear that Pliny has a low opinion of magic and the art of the Magus, although he betrays that it has a shadow of truth, too often polluted, as he says, by the use of poisons or drugs. This indicates that the Magi, and what was served at the dinner, most likely involved pharmaceutical expertise.

In this pharmacological context, Pliny goes on to discuss Apion, a Hellenized Egyptian Neo-Pythagorean grammarian whom he had actually met when he was a young man. Apion also had pharmaceutical expertise. He claimed that an Egyptian plant named after Osiris had divinatory properties and that he had used it himself to summon back the spirit of Homer. Although technically a grammarian, as a Neo-Pythagorean, Apion could more properly be called a shaman or magician, especially in view of his conversations with the long dead poet Homer. In all probability, the initiatory dinner of Tiridates included entheogens, or even a sequence of them. The Mithraic banquets were traditionally a sequence of seven grades

of initiation, the highest of which Nero in his solar identity had apparently attained. The cult, moreover, must already have taken root in the city of Rome so that suitable accommodations in the form of some kind of temple were available for Nero's initiation dinners.

It is likely that even as early as Augustus the military included initiates. In 45 BCE, Augustus himself met the great Stoic philosopher Athenodorus Cananites from Anatolian Tarsus, a hotbed of Mithraism. He brought him to Rome, where he stayed as an advisor until 15 BCE, when the philosopher returned to his native city to reform its constitution. It would be highly unlikely that the two never discussed philosophy or religion. In fact, Augustus styled himself as the putative son of Apollo[4] and once officiated at a sacramental meal dressed as the Sun with twelve of his colleagues costumed as the signs of the zodiac.[5]

There is a tradition about Pontius Pilate that indicates he may also have participated in the entheogenic rituals. Around 10 BCE, Augustus sent envoys to the troubled Scottish Highlands at the northern border of his empire. One of the soldiers had a son there. The infant returned to Rome with his father and took the family name of Pontii, and upon attaining adulthood, he was freed from slavery. As the customary sign of liberation, he was awarded the red felt Phrygian cap called the *pileus* or (*pilos* in Greek). *Pileatus* means capped with that headdress and is an epithet of Mithras. *Pilatus* is either a corruption of that title or describes him as armed with the javelin or *pilum*. He rose in the military ranks through nepotism, as the husband of an illegitimate daughter of the future Emperor Tiberius.[6]

As a Hellenized Jew from Tarsus and a soldier, it is likely that Paul was also an initiate. One can only wonder to what degree his version of Christian practice was derived from the model of a Mystery religion, with its numerous similarities to Mithraism.[7]

The Imperial Cult

The Roman imperial court continued its official practice of Mithraism for 300 years. All the emperors were most likely adherents of the cult, but we learn of particulars only when they surface as anecdotal events. Thus Commodus (180–192) commissioned a bust of himself with a Persian cap in the likeness of Mithras,[8] and we are told that he performed the Mithraic

initiation with an actual human sacrifice, whereas the rite was intended only to intensely intimidate the candidate.[9] Pliny was aware of this requirement of the initiation in asserting that Nero wouldn't have hesitated to do the same in order to become a full Magus. Septimius Severus (193–211) and his Syrian empress Julia Domna, who also promoted the divinity of Apollonius of Tyana (a Cappadocian Greek contemporary of Christ) added a Mithraeum to the house of Trajan (98–117). The famous Roman baths of their son Caracalla (211–217) included a subterranean Mithraeum. Each in the succession of caesars who were created by the support of their armies in the third century was bound to support the Mithraic religion of their soldiers.

Valerian (253–260) mercilessly purged the empire of Christians and declared December 25 the festival of the Unconquered Sun, as the days begin perceptibly to lengthen after the winter solstice. The Christians would eventually adopt this date for the birth of their god. Valerian's son and coregent Gallienus had himself depicted as that Sol Invictus (Invincible Sun) on his coinage. Diocletian (284–305) after his retirement dedicated a great altar to Mithras at the Carnutum Mithraeum on the Danube in the year 307, and he placed the entire empire under the god's divine protectorate. Diocletian court was commonly seen as an imitation of the Sassanid dynasty that had replaced the Parthians and was seen as the second Persian Empire (226–651). Mithraic clergy in his court were suspected of instigating his persecution of the Christians in 303 under his son-in-law Galerius Maximianus.

Julian the Apostate (361–363), in his attempt to reverse the Conversion to Christianity and revive the old pagan religions, was himself initiated by the philosopher Maximus of Ephesus, perhaps also with a human sacrifice (at least according to his detractors.) He had a Mithraeum erected in his palace in Constantinople. Like Nero, he saw himself as the incarnation of the god Mithras. Ever since childhood, he had cherished a secret devotion to the god Helios as his spiritual father. He died during his expedition against the Persians, apparently desiring to conquer the land that had given him his religion, assured that his tutelary deity would grant him victory.

In 361, adherents of the briefly restored pagan religions lynched George the Arian, bishop of Alexandria (later to become Saint George) when he attempted to build a Christian church above one of their underground

sanctuaries. According to the legend, the Mithracists tied him to a camel, tore him to pieces, and then burnt him with the beast.

> An adytum of vast depth was discovered which unveiled the nature of their heathenish rites: for there were found there skulls of many persons of all ages, who were said to have been immolated for the purpose of divination by the inspection of entrails, when the pagans performed these and such magic arts whereby they enchanted the souls of men.
>
> —Socrates Scolasticus-Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.2[10]

By 312 the conversion of Constantine, who as a soldier and a worshiper of the Sun was likely a Mithraic initiate, had dealt the cult a serious blow. The vision that precipitated his conversion indicated the superiority of Christ, for he saw a cross shining above his former god, the Sun. However, the interpretation of his imperial standard is ambiguous and can easily be seen as Mithraic, and he styled himself as an avatar of Mithras. He did, however, institute a policy of religious tolerance, which set the groundwork for the freedom usurped in the cause of radical intolerance.[11]

> He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS.
>
> —Eusebius, *Conversion of Constantine*, 28

Subsequently, the dominating Christians attempted to eradicate the religion with all the fervor of persecution that they themselves had recently suffered, desecrating the sanctuaries and even murdering Mithraic priests. In the Saarburg Mithraeum the skeleton of a man was found lying face downward with his wrists bound with an iron chain behind his back, probably a priest murdered and ritually cursed. His burial in the sanctuary was meant to desecrate it for all eternity.

Mithraeum Banqueting Chamber

The rectangular or oblong chambers, called Mithraea, typically measured about twenty-five by seventy feet and were divided by a broad aisle on either side of which was a wide raised stone platform, which was not so much for sitting but to be spread with pallets for reclining while the members witnessed the various pageantries enacted in the central space. These rituals prepared them for the ascending grades of initiation, and the Mithraea was the "set and setting" for the Mystery. As with the original Christian Eucharist of the early agape halls,[12] the Mithraea were not banquet rooms and the Mithraic sacrament was not ordinary food, but, as the Elder Pliny called it, magical, i.e., entheogenic.

> The initiate became deified (*entheoi*) in the Eleusinian Mysteries by partaking in a meal which represented the body of the god. In the mysteries of Attis, a meal of bread and liquid, representing the body of the god, enabled the initiate to participate in his passion and resurrection…. Such ideas were pervasive in the pagan world.
>
> —Hyam MacCoby, *Paul and Hellenism*.[13]

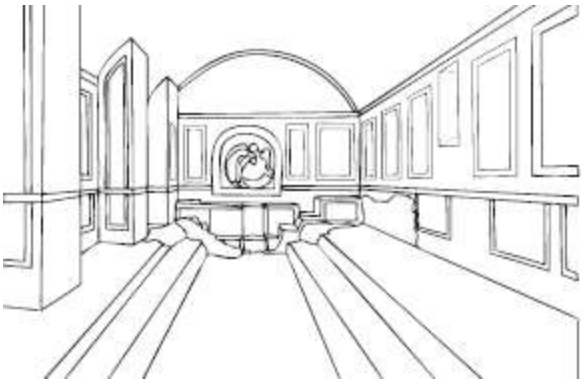
Although other elements of Mithraic ritual may have varied over the long history of the religion in its different locales, the sacramental meal was always essential and the design of the Mithraea invariably was intended to accommodate it.

The Mithraea were kept intentionally small[14] and when the membership exceeded their modest capacity, rather than enlarge the chamber, additional halls were often constructed in the near vicinity. This tradition of maintaining small communities for the ritual persists among the Kurds today in their version of the Mithraic banquet, which they celebrate by drinking an ecstasy-inducing wine on rooftops.

Although the slaughtered bull was a mythological rep resentation of a Eucharist meal, it is inconceivable that such a menacing and dangerous creature could be butchered in so confined a space. The flood of blood has made the chamber entirely intolerable, especially since there were no provisions for draining it or cleansing the chamber.

Mithraic Eucharist. *Bas-relief fragment, Konjica, Bosnia, Muzej grada, Sarajevo. The two initiates of the highest grade recline in the center, with members of the five other orders—Raven, Persian, and Lion on the left, and Soldier and Bride on the right. A tripod with four circular loaves of bread marked with a cross, representing the four quarters of the universe, is in front of the banquet table, draped with a bull hide. The Persian (Perses) presents the drinking horn, whose intoxicating potion conferred immortality. Limestone, 37x27 cm. Museo Civito Archeologico Bologna.*

In fact, the actual slaughter of a bull upon a grating above an initiate who would be washed in its blood was a rite in the religion of Attis and Cybele, and it sensibly took place outside. The Vatican is built above the remains of such a site. And the bull sacrifice occurs today in the Muslim Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), when the streets literally run with torrents of blood. The mystical symbolism of this bull slaughter persists in the Spanish tradition of the bullfight, whose inner significance inspired Picasso with his series of depictions of the Minotaur.



Banqueting chamber, reconstruction, Ostia Mithraeum.

Nor do the subterranean Mithraea, even with their vestibules, provide facilities for the roasting of the animal's flesh, which certainly could not take place without suffocation in an enclosed and cramped subterranean chamber. The slaughter and cooking could, of course, have taken place aboveground outside, but perhaps most significant, a slaughtered bull would provide food for hundreds, not a mere thirty. In the Eid al-Adha, the meat is distributed to the poorer members of the whole extended family. The slaughter, moreover, commemorated a heroic mythic event, whereas the actual slaughter would have to have been performed by a professional butcher, typically someone of a lower class, and it seems unlikely that every Mithraic community included one in its small membership.

Significantly, a few Mithraea burial pits or garbage dumps have been found with the remains of various slaughtered animals, but these do not include bulls. Where are the bulls' remains? The artistic evidence for the banqueting cannot be used to describe the ritual event. Thus the Santa Prisca Mithraeum depicts a procession with youths leading a bull, a ram, and a pig while holding cocks, wine *kraters*, and bread; which surely would have been too much food for a small community, especially since only two people share the final feast. The supposed menu for this banquet is symbolic or mythical as it is all brought to Sol and Mithras in a cave, the Cosmic Cave, and not the Mithraeum.[15] Similarly, depictions of the Last Supper often display a variety of foods on the table, although the sacramental items celebrated in the Eucharist are only bread and wine.[16]

Justin Martyr, in fact, confirms that the sacramental meal was not common bread and common drink but symbolic communion with the deity.

> And this food is called among us the Eucharist … which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding that the same thing be done. Bread and a cup of water are made flesh and blood with certain incantations of the one who is being initiated.
>
> —Justin Martyr, *First Apology*

The final initiatory item, the sacred Mithraic meal, was a consciousness-altering liquid served in a *rhyton*, a drinking vessel in the shape of an animal's horn, providing it with its taurine identity. The ancient Greek shaman Epimenides of Crete invented the famous paradox about lying Cretans. He was supposed to have fallen asleep for fifty-seven years in a cave, during which time he was free to wander outside his body. These miraculous feats of shamanism were accomplished with a special herbal compound that he kept stored, for want of anything better, in a "bull's hoof."[17] The bull sacrament is then obviously a metaphor for the actual food of the Eucharist meal, like the transubstantiated bread and wine of the Christian communion, the Blood and Body of their Lord.[18]

Myth and Reality

As a classic example of the Mystery religions that were so common in ancient spiritual life, little was known by outsiders regarding the details of the Mithraic initiation or of the finer points of their mythological exegesis. These were primarily oral, centered on a foundational myth which imparted a profound meaning and significance through a complex process of initiation. If there is one unifying constant among these religions, it is that almost without exception they ritualized a sacred meal (or potion, as in the case of Eleusis) that induced an intense spiritual experience for the initiates. Amongst the Vedic, Mazdean, Isaianic, Orphic, Hellenic, Christian, et cetera. religions, the central Mystery revealed to and experienced by the prepared celebrant was the *mythos*, a kind of indoctrination guiding the *mystai* through a profound spiritual trance during which the "story" became reality.

The myths and icons of such cults contained their own mysteries that could be revealed liturgically or through insight to the adept. Such works of art, though often considered crude or amateurish by critics, represent

graphically the Mystery for those who have “eyes to see.” The apocalyptic story, for example, is clearly intended as a simple exoteric version of the central entheogenic Revelation of the religion. This Apocalypse found a much more complex, subtle, secretive development within the cult that was imparted in the course of initiation through the progressive stages of the Mystery.

Although very little in the way of written sources has survived the ravages of time and zealous religious suppression, sporadic references to Mithras and Mithraism are common in ancient texts. There are also about six hundred brief inscriptions and graffiti, many of which are simple dedications or fragmentary and damaged. Mithraism is also mentioned occasionally in the writings of the Christian Fathers, including the *Acts of the Martyrs*. All of this provides a basis for uncovering what actually was experienced in the subterranean banqueting halls.

The similarities in the archaeological record clearly indicate that these subterranean sanctuaries with their restricted elite congregations of initiates were not suitable for ordinary banqueting. A sequence of various magical foods programmed the ascending stages of the initiate’s acceptance into the confraternity of members. The iconography and mythical traditions of Mithraism identify one of these as the primary and ultimate botanical sacrament.

two

Becoming One with God

Tauroctony

The front wall or altar niche opposite the entrance of the typical Mithraeum, facing eastward toward the rising sun,[1] commonly depicted the central heroic exploit of Mithras, his slaying of the bull, the so-called tauroctony. The event takes place in a cave, and the placement of the tauroctony in the altar niche effectively identifies the Mithraeum chamber itself as such a cave. Mithras characteristically averts his gaze from the dying beast,[2] upon whose back he kneels. The pose, which is unlikely in reality, is obviously symbolic. Significantly, as he kneels upon the beast, he essentially has only one operative leg, with his right foot pinning the bull's extended right hind hoof, with the bull also kneeling.

When color is an option, as in a fresco, Mithras is characteristically all in red, with Persian trousers, tunic, and a flowing cape, sometimes painted with the starry firmament on its underside. The cap is sometimes speckled with white, or with stars when the color is absent. This motif, white specks against a red background, sometimes also ex tends to the clothed body of Mithras, as we see in the fresco in the Marino Mithraeum in the Alban Hills near Rome. The bull is always white. The entire configuration is a red- and-white speckled god, cap and hemispherical cape, with a single leg atop a white pediment comprised of the similarly one-legged bull. (*See color figures 1 and 2, p. 97.*)

The tauroctony depicts Mithras as being one with the bull, itself a secret representation of the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, the most probable botanical original of the Vedic Soma[3] sacrament and, given the research presented presently, its Avestan analogue *haoma*,[4] even though it is well established that other psychoactive subtances could have been substituted in the later traditions and often in fact were.[5] Thus Yasht 10 of the *Avesta*

speaks of "all the *haomas* … having many species" wherever they are found. These substitutes range from cannabis, ephedra, ergot, and perhaps datura, to simple alcohol. Even when surrogates were employed, the attributes of the original, embedded in the mythological tradition, persisted and are often descriptive of the mushroom.

The *Amanita muscaria* mushroom is characterized by its red top, speckled with white, upon a white leg or stipe. Thus Mithras and the bull present this distinctive combination, for it is characteristic of the hero myth that the hero-shaman acquires attributes of the god and the sacramental entheogen that unites the three of them together. That is to say that all three —shaman, entheogen, and deity—are of one divine-botanical identity, which is also the essential ritual purpose of the sacramental communion meal that the initiates, too, will be privileged to share.[6] One is what one eats, or more explicitly, the state of mind is determined by the nature of the ingested drug, as the prophet Teiresias explains in the *Bacchae* tragedy.[7] More simply put, Mithras, as well as the bull, can be expected to have attributes descriptive of the sacred mushroom, which similarly shares an identity with the solar god.

The Mithras-bull configuration is a pictorial personification of the mushroom at the moment of its sacrifice or harvest. Thus there is a flow of cosmic energy through the configuration, with Mithras looking up toward the head of the Sun rising behind the bull and shedding its rays directly at the god's eyes, while the bull, with arched neck pulled back forcefully, and usually vertically like the white stipe of the muscaria mushroom, looks up directly toward the Moon's head descending in front of it. A similar flow is personified by the two torchbearers who flank the tauroctony; one in front, beneath the Moon, with his torch inverted downwards, while the other behind lifts his torch upwards toward the Sun. This flow of light or energy through the Tauroctony indicates a cosmic axis or a gateway to another universe.

In the Vedic *Rig Veda*, Soma is a bellowing red bull[8] associated with Agni, the god of fire (cognate with English "ignite"). Agni was manifested as fire, lightning, and the Sun, with the lightning bolt as the pathway uniting the solar and terrestrial fires, and also was seen as the generating source of the mushroom. Mithras is also part of this complex. In the *Rig Veda*, he "was pleased by Soma."[9] In the Persian *Avesta, haoma* is offered to him.[10]

Those ancient associations persisted. Thus the ninth or tenth-century medieval Armenian epic *David of Sasun* preserves Mithraic themes and contains many references to *haoma*. A most revealing example is the hero David, son of Mher, who actually eats mushrooms and becomes disoriented.[11] Armenia was the ancient Parthia, whose Roman-sponsored king Tiridates initiated the Emperor Nero.

Another mushroom-like attribute of Mithras in the *Avesta* is his thousand ears and ten thousand eyes.[12] Similarly in the *Rig Veda*, Soma sees with one thousand eyes.[13] Multiple eyes or other sense organs make each a separate entity and indicate altered perception. They are the equivalent of the metaphor of the "disembodied eye" for visionary experience.[14] A similar theme occurs in Greek mythology with the multiple eyes that are the distinctive epithet of the cowherd Argos as the "all-seeing" *Panoptes*.[15] The white speckled cap and raiment of Mithras both depict the multiplicity of these "eyes" and the red cap of the entheogenic mushroom. His repeated epithet as the lord of the cattle pastures, moreover, can only be describing him as the bull itself. Mithras and the bull he slaughters are one entity, and Mithras is offering himself up as sacrifice.

It should be remembered that there was no public display of Mithraic art. It was viewed only within the ritual space of the Mithraeum chambers and the secret meaning or interpretation of the depictions would have formed an essential part in the indoctrination of initiates. In fact, some Mithraea included additional subterranean rooms that apparently functioned as a schoolhouse.

The Mithraic bull was no ordinary bull, it was the Cosmic Bull. Its flesh and blood was not beef, but the main item of the Mithraic Eucharist, the equivalent of the Christian transubstantiated Body and Blood of Christ. Ingesting it made the initiate one with the living diety. The sacrificed bull represents the harvested plant-god Soma-haoma[16] The bull is the secret society's encrypted metaphor for their consciousness-altering Eucharist.

Cap of the Covenant

For its practicioners, Mithras was the personification of a cosmic alliance, like the Biblical Covenant and Testament, the terms of accord between the human and the divine. He was named in Sanskrit as "friend" or "treaty

alliance." In Persian, his name translates as "contract." The earliest occurrence of the god's name is as Mitra in a Hittite document from the fourteenth century BCE, where he is invoked to endorse a treaty.[17]

He was the essential intercessory or mediator between god and man—the Mesites, literally the "one who is in the middle," and hence "joins opposites," a function also claimed for Christ. Like the alliance of Prometheus with the Olympians in Greek mythology, the role of Mithras is the essential element in the dominance of the One God.

> There is one god, one also the mediator of god and man, the man Christ Jesus (*mesites theou kai anthropou*).
>
> —Paul, *First Epistle to Timothy*, 2.5

As the "joiner," the god's name actually denotes his special cap. It is the Greek *mitra*, a band of cloth often wrapped as a turban. As the headdress of bishops and abbots it did not achieve its present form of the stiff, joined, double front and back peaked pieces until after the eleventh century,[18] although this design probably perpetuates the original meaning of Mithras as the "joiner." The miter box, which produces the joining for cabinetry, is probably similarly derived, and the root occurs in German *mit* and English *with*. The Jewish high priest wore a similar crimson linen turban, in accordance with the Lord's commandment to Moses, as a sign of a prophet and divine power.[19] It bore a plate of pure gold, engraved with the declaration "Consecrated to Yahweh." The design of such headdresses is symbolic of what empowers the official who wears it; hence it is similar to the ornamentation of thrones.[20] Ultimately, such empowerment derives from access to the spiritual realm via the ritual use of sacraments.

In such rites, the god was thought to confer sovereignty, wisdom, and worthiness upon the kings in order that they fulfill their central role as divinely mandated. Often the sovereigns assumed the god's name, as for example with the six kings of Pontus called Mithridates, or "Given by Mithras."

The sixth, Eupator Dionysus, known as the Great, (120–63 BCE) lent his name to the *mithradatum*, an herbal concoction that is an antidote to poisons, supposedly the dog's-tooth violet, *Erythronium dens canis* (or perhaps the garlic germander, *Teucrium Scordium*). Of most importance to

this tradition is the fact that it suggests the involvement of Mithraism with pharmacological experimentation. The term "mithradatum" has come to designate the practice of building resistance to poisons by taking small and increasingly larger doses of the same substance.

The most ancient meaning of the Mithraic turban-headdress is that it is a "binding" (from the root *mei-*, or *mi-*, "to bind"), a mark of "friendship," from "to be kindly," deriving originally from the basic root "to place" in the sense of assembling, marshalling, and hence inspiring.[21]

Whether it is the winding of the headbands in a turban or the contemporary mitre of bishops (which replaced an earlier red beret cap), the headdress signifies sacred union. In the case of Mithras, it was his defining attribute, and it took the form that strongly suggests the enthoegenic mushroom—a red, white-speckled Phrygian cap. (*See color figures 3, 4, and 5, p. 98.*) For the initiated, the cap symbolizes their living god and the entheogen of the Covenant that binds them to the unseen transcendant realms and ultimately leads them into Cosmic Battle. Others also wore the cap in antiquity, and it often had similar connotations of a mushroom sacrament.[22]

The Phrygian cap, a common artistic motif.

As the *bonnet rouge* or liberty cap, the Phrygian cap was adopted by the extremists in the French Revolution and nurtured by secret societies like the Freemasons, where some of their most prominent members were still aware of its mushroom identity.[23] It even occurs as the red cap on the stipe of a sword, the Mithraic Sword of the Accord, in the great seal of the United States Army.[24]

Rapture

Just as Mithras was the friend and ally of the Lord of Light, each initiate acquired him as the guide for his own ascent to the rim of the universe, to stand entranced in the presence of the living signs of the zodiac in the Empyrean. The Classical description of such a journey occurs in Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," his Stoic substitute for Plato's eschatological myth of Er in the *Republic*.

> And as I looked on every side I saw other things transcendently glorious and wonderful. There were stars which we never see from here below, and all the stars were vast far beyond what we have ever imagined. The earth itself indeed looked to me so small as to make me ashamed of our Empire, which was a mere point on its surface.
>
> —Cicero, "Dream of Scipio"

The most advanced level of Mithraic initiation was experienced as a liberating spiritual rebirth.

> Born at dawn on this twelfth day before the first of December. (*Natus prima luce duobus Augg(ustis) co(n)s(ulibus) Severo et Anton(ino) XII k(alendas) Decem(bres) dies Saturni luna XVIII.*)
>
> —Graffito, Santa Prisca Mithraeum[25]

Mithras eventually ascended to heaven by feasting with the Sun on the hide of the slaughtered Bull. This sacred meal is almost as frequently depicted as the Bull-slaying in the Mithraea.

> You have saved us with the eternal blood poured. (*Et nos servasti eternali sanguine fuso.*)
>
> —Graffito, Santa Prisca Mithraeum[26]

The religion that had survived already for two millennia was syncretistic, incorporating elements of Mesopotamian and Hellenic symbolism. It was typical of the Classical world to recognize the deities of foreign nations as versions of their own gods. Thus the Mithraic Zoroastrian pantheon consisted of Ahura Mazda (related to the Vedic Mitra-Varuna,

diad of the Vedas), who was equated with Zeus. His opposite, the force of darkness, was Ahriman, equated with Hades-Pluto. Kronos, the father of the first generation of Olympians, was often confused with Khronos, the figure of time personified, and equated with Zurvan. The Babylonian Shamash was seen as a version of Mithras and identified with the sun god Helios. Anahita, the sometime mother of Mithras (since he also had a motherless birth), was equated with Artemis, both of them associated with special springs or waters.

Although the origin of Mithras was Aryan, the impetus for much of the later mythology and ritual is still very much a matter of debate. Certainly Mesopotamian influences played a major role in brokering this religion to the Occidental world, as did the speculations of Hellenistic thinkers. The astronomical and alchemical aspects may be a Chaldean addition and may not go back to its earliest origins. The theme of ecstatic redemption through the sacramental meal is its essential feature, however, and was the most obvious way that the Soma-*haoma* rite reached the West. Surprisingly, this has been the feature usually least noticed by scholars, even for those who acknowledge that it was the sacramental meal of warriors. During the two thousand years that separate the Vedic Mithras from the Roman cult of the bull-slayer, the secret ritual practice underwent numerous mutations. Despite the changes, there is no doubt that its ethnic identity in the Roman Empire was recognized as Persian and the cult of the Magi priesthood.[27]

> As intriguing as the problem of haoma/soma's identification is, it does not contribute one way or the other to a religious understanding of the sacred juice…. A second major property of haoma/soma … was that of a stimulant taken by warriors before going into battle.
>
> —W. Malandra.[28]

> It did not really matter what Soma was, since it was lost so early in history.
>
> —W. Doniger.[29]

Since there is so little documentation about Western Mithraism, it is extremely difficult to compare, contrast, and otherwise understand how the Western manifestation of Mithras is related to the Vedic and Persian

pantheons. While there is no doubt that Mitra, Mithra, and Mithras are essentially the same deity, there are two schools of thought regarding the origin of Roman Mithraism.[30] While some scholars argue for or against an independent Roman genesis, others, like ourselves, feel that there is ample evidence for both Aryan and Persian sources as well as distinctly Hellenistic and Roman innovations to the entheogenic ritual. An indisputable and well-documented connecting thread between the Eastern and Western Mithraic rites concerns the use of botanical sacrament. We argue that the visionary state induced by *haoma* is the essential and indispensible element to the Mithraic religion, whatever the particulars of its outward forms or cultural context, and that identifying the specific sacrament also informs the mythology and unanswered questions relating to the complex of metaphors expressed in the mythic narrative.

As ample evidence demonstrates, the mushroom-centered ritual survived in the West, as well as in the East, and was a fundamental element of the political and military power that upheld the far-flung Roman Empire. The very similar rites of early Christianity easily assimilated it, and it continued to survive in the so-called heresies throughout the medieval period, and also in the perpetuation of pagan knowledge in hermetic alchemy.

The entheogenic initiation was as fundamental to the formation of the pagan and Christian cultural identity and the political organization of civilized Europe as the similar experience afforded the Greco-Roman world in other Mystery initiations. Foremost among those experiences being the consciousness-altering ergot potion of the Eleusinian rites,[31] as well as those like the Mystery of Osiris assimilated from Egypt. Even Cicero added his voice to the chorus of endorsements for Eleusis, which included most of the famous artists and leaders of Classical antiquity, claiming that there was nothing better that Athens had offered the world.

Battle Fury

The *haoma* cult appears to have been a basis of the warrior brotherhoods of the Persian Achaemenid dynasty of Cyrus and his successors, and like the later Nordic berserkers,[32] the sacrament energized them for battle. In the funeral inscription of Darius at his grave in Naks-i-Rustam near Persepolis,

at the end of the uppermost row in a list of twenty-nine countries that brought tribute appears the name Saka Haomavarga, which means "Haoma-wolves," a confraternity of wolf-warriors bound by the sacrament.[33] The berserkers metamorphosed for battle into bears or wolves in the same manner.

The intoxicating nature of the sacrament is well documented. Ctesias, a Greek doctor at the Persian court of Artaxerxes, recorded that he personally assisted at a celebration of Mithras and witnessed the king dance and drink himself into a stupor, a ritual intoxication that was reserved for him alone on this day.[34] The followers of Darius were also said to drink urine to induce ecstasy. These combined attributes, physical prowess and intoxicating urine, betray the identity of the sacrament as *Amanita muscaria*, the fly agaric, for several reasons: first, because ingesting *Amanita muscaria* is known to induce a heightened stamina and aggressive fury, and also because the metabolite of *Amanita muscaria* remains psychoactive in the urine of those who have ingested it. In fact, some shamanic societies considered drinking the urine of a person who has eaten *Amanita muscaria* a superior means of accessing the drug than ingestion of the mushroom itself because the consciousness-altering properties are preserved while the often unpleasant side-effects of eating the mushroom are not. This quality of *Amanita muscaria* adds further evidence to it being the original identity of Soma-*haoma*.

In fact, linguistically Soma-haoma may even name the plant as a "spongy thing," which is to say, a mushroom or fungus.[35] The Latin word *fungus* is cognate with the Greek *spongos* and German *Schwamm* and is metaphoric for the spongy texture characteristic of mushrooms.

The Nativity

Mithras was born on December 25.[36] For obvious reasons of the Sol Invictus, in the third century Pope Liberius finally decided to place the birth of Jesus also on this date, although there had been considerable controversy about the appropriateness of even specifying a birthday for a nonpagan god.[37]

> Although we share with them Sunday, we are not apprehensive lest we seem to be heathens.
>
> —Tertullian of Carthage

Persian tradition describes the birth of Mithras from the immaculate virgin Anahita (Greek Anaïtis, assimilated to Aphrodite and Ishtar), who prior to the reformation of the religion was a popular fertility goddess, the primal source of waters flowing from the cosmic mountain. She conceived Mithras from the seed of Zarathustra as it was preserved in Lake Hamun in the Persian province of Sistan. Mithras ascended to the Empyrean sixty-four years later, and Parthian documents and coins bear double dates, one counting the intervals since the ascension in 208 BCE.

The myth as promulgated in the Mithraic initiation was that it was not from a woman that he was born, but from a rock thrust upwards as if by some magical force. The rock was called the "rock that gave birth to god," *petra genetrix dei*. And he emerged as the "begetter of light," *genitor luminis*, the "god who was the begetter born from a rock," *deus genitor rupe natus*.[38] This strange birth is well attested in Mithraic art. (*See color figures 6, 7, and 8, p. 99.*)

The *petra genetrix* is the Greek *lithos empsychos* ("animate rock") or *baitylos*, such as was called the stone that Kronos ate in the myth of the birth of Zeus, which similarly implicates a stone in the birth of the Olympian deities since the stone caused Kronos to regurgitate the siblings of Zeus.[39] There were various baetyls, or sacred stones, throughout the ancient Levant. They were venerated in cultic practice and were often associated with the sun god or the Phrygian mother goddess. Even the Kaaba in Mecca contains a holy black stone that predates the prophet Mohammad. They were thought to have fallen from heaven as meteorites and are often associated with eagles.

These rocks were apparently capable of inducing visions, as is indicated by the story of Jacob's vision of the Heavenly Ladder: he laid his head down on a stone for use as a pillow and received the vision that God had granted him this land for his people. When he awoke he realized that the place was sacred as the Gate of Heaven, and he took the rock upon which he had laid his head, set it up as a cosmic pillar, and anointed it. He named the place Beth-El, that is to say, "House of God," *Baityl* or *Baitylos*. The

rock was preserved and venerated.[40] If it had an etymology in Greek, a *tylos* is a knobbed pillar, like a phallos, and *baios* indicates that it is a little one. It is also a "bolt" that acts as the key to unlock the Gateway. Both pillars and stone balls have been found in Mithraea.

The Goddess Ishtar summons the awakening of the sun god who cuts his way upwards from the mountain with a saw in hand. *Akkadian cylinder seal, ca. 2250 BCE.*

These sacred stones are a common pun on *petra* for "stone" and variants of *pitra*, which is the Hebrew word for "mushroom" (*ptr*) and occurs widely throughout Afro-Asian languages as indicating "seeing, beholding, explaining, and interpreting," appearing in Egyptian, Nabitaean, Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician, Punic, and Neo-Punic.[41] An inscription from a seventh-century divinatory temple at Ekron, thirty-five kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, bears the name of a Canaanite goddess that can be read as Ptryh (pronounced *pet-ree-yah*), with the final syllable as a suffix indicating divinity, as in the name of Yahweh. Ptryh is a variant of the Ugaritic Pidray, the goddess of illumination and lightning, who was the daughter of Baal-zeebub, the so-called Lord of the Flies.[42] The inscription was found near a figurine, probably of this goddess, squeezing the milk from her breast as the divine potion, and the temple contained a number of drinking vessels, suggesting that the potion was drunk there. We should expect that the sacrament, therefore, was visionary. Since the goddess is a personification of the mushroom, it is not surprising that the vessels for her milk have a mushroom-like configuration.

An “animate rock” that houses a god and that opens the divine gateway is a perfect metaphor for a psychoactive mushroom. Theophrastus even records the tradition that mushrooms could turn into stones when dried by the sun.[43] The association of the mushroom goddess with flies betrays the identity of this particular mushroom. The egg stage of the fly agaric, while still enclosed in its universal veil, in fact, looks very much like a stone, and its sudden emergence from a rock is yet another suggestion of Mithras’s representation of the mushroom.

The mushroom was too sacred to be explicitly identified, and thus it was commonly referred to with descriptive metaphors, the parasol being the most frequent. Anthropomorphized versions of the mushroom can be seen in the example of the so-called Shade-foots or *Skiapodes*, who were a tribe of creatures with a single extremely vigorous leg and a single broad, webbed foot; when they tired from the exertion of leaping, they fell flat upon their backs and rested in the shade cast by the foot that served as a parasol. Similar creatures went by names like One-legs or One-eyes, the single eye being metaphoric of the visionary experience.[44] Aja Ekapad, called the “Not-born One-foot,” is a deity mentioned six times in the *Rig Veda* and is apparently an archaic name for Soma. Unborn describes its seedless propagation.

> The effect … became evident by the time the men had swallowed the fourth mushroom. Their eyes took on a wild look … with a positively blinding gleam, and their hands began to tremble nervously…. After a few minutes a deep lethargy overcame them, and they began quietly singing monotonous improvised songs…. They suddenly sprang raving from their seats and began loudly and wildly calling for drums…. And now began an indescribable dancing and singing, a deafening drumming and a wild running about…. during which the men threw everything about recklessly.
>
> —Report of field research with Siberian tribes, 1903.[45]

> Elder Brother watched aghast as Younger Brother became fused to that giant mushroom’s stipe. He beheld Younger Brother begin to grow a bright red cap. At first slowly, then faster and faster, Younger brother began to spin in the sun.

—Miskwedo of the Ahnishinaubeg.[46]

Mithras emerged from the rock often holding a torch as the rising light and a dagger,[47] perhaps to both indicate the muscaria's powerful "cutting through" of the earth and its luminous revelation as the white universal veil gives way to reveal the torchlike fiery red of its expanding cap. Similarly, the Mesopotamian sun god Shamash, with whom Mithras was equated, uses a saw to cut his way upward out of the mountain on an Akkadian cylinder seal in the British Museum.[48] (*See color figure 7, p. 99.*)

Rock-birth from pinecone. *Red sandstone (50 × 27 cm). Frankfurt, Heddernheim* ***(left). Mithras being born from the rock.*** *San Clemente Mithraeum, Rome. (See color figure 8, p. 99.)*

In a stone relief from Vercovicium discovered outside the Roman Fort at Housesteads, Britain, Mithras is seen at the moment of his sudden birth as an anthropomorphized mushroom. Above the unworked base, in an open oval circle, the torso of the naked Mithras appears emerging from an egg with its two halves visible above the head and below the hips. His raised arms are lost, but his hands are preserved in the rim of the circle, holding a dagger and a torch. Above his head is the sign for the summer equinox.[49]

Thus the initiates could expect the same miraculous experience as they were lifted upwards out of the confining egglike subterranean chamber of the Mithraeum toward the fiery celestial Empyrean, for this rock of the Nativity was also called a "cave,"[50] and the rock-birth was often depicted, like the tauroctony, as occurring in a cavernous chamber. The Armenians placed a very strong emphasis upon the fertility-based interpretation of Mithras's birth, claiming that he is, in fact, reborn every year from his cave dwelling. Similarly, not only was Christ resurrected from a cave, but according to Eusebius and other Church Fathers, there was a version of His Nativity from a cave.[51]

God of birthing for the birthing of God.

—Mithraic inscription.[52]

Red Cap

Mithras emerged with a naked white torso but already wearing his characteristic red Phrygian cap, white stipe with red cap, sometimes speckled with stars, and often amidst fire, as in the Mithraeum of Dura-Europos, where both the cap and the rock are flaming.[53] The hair is sometimes painted golden yellow, which is equally significant, not only for the god's assimilation with Apollo-Helios but from its ethnopharmacological metaphor as Golden Fleece.[54] The cap is such an essential item of his iconography, however, that he is almost never depicted without it, for which reason he has the epithet of *Pileatus*, the "capped one,"[55] and since it is invariably red and often spotted or jeweled, he was appropriately termed the "red-capped one."[56]

The metaphor of the cap is so naturally suggestive that the botanical term for the mushroom's top is *pileus*, and it commonly figures in folklore

and fairy tales, such as “Little Red Riding Hood,” called “Little Red-Cap” in German, and among the diminutive fairy folk frequenting forests.[57] Altaic shamans who use *Amanita muscaria* consider their caps an essential aspect of their craft, since it is there they believe that their powers are concentrated.[58]

The psychoactive *Psilocybe semilanceata* (“half-spear” or pointed) mushroom is commonly called “liberty cap” because of its resemblance to the Phrygian cap and its association with the French revolutionaries. Its botanical description as “half-spear” probably derives from the same tradition since the Mithraic cap, atop the Sword of the Accord (a spear in this case), with its definite fungal connotations, was used in the illuminations of the *Déclaration des droits de l’homme*.[59] It is common for easily available varieties with similarly psychoactive properties to be substituted for the original sacrament; thus the Psilocybe resembles the *bonnet rouge*, but obviously lacks its distinctive red color.

The Herdsmen Attendants

Not unlike the Christian nativity scene, shepherds witnessed the miraculous birth of Mithras, the enigmatic Cautes and Cautopates, who like him wear red caps. The caps alone sometimes represent them, like the twin Dioskouroi, with whom they sometimes are identified.

The Dioskouroi (Dioscuri) were the twin sons of Zeus from his affair with Leda. He seduced her while he was in the form of a swan, and the result was an egg from which they hatched, each maintaining half the shell as their distinctive Phrygian red caps.[60] One was mortal and the other immortal, but they shared their fate, alternating between life and death on successive days.

Each of the attendants of Mithras usually carries at least one torch, and they indicate the two directions of the light, or the similar alternation of life and death expressed in the Dioskouroi. They are similar to the two thieves crucified with Christ, one destined for salvation, the other for descent into the underworld.[61] In medieval tradition they become the wise and foolish virgins, the former holding their lamps upright, the others with lamps unlit and upside down.

Cautes, apparently representing the rising sun, points his torch upwards, sometimes with the cock that heralds the dawn, the bird in Greek called "Persian," at his feet, while Cautopates inverts his torch for the setting of the sun; or perhaps they represent the solar equinoxal phases. The mushroom that ascends toward the Empyrean had its origin from the fall of light from the heavens. Cautes is associated with the head of the bull and stands in front of it, while Cautopates is its tail end and stands behind, often holding it in his hand.

Crossed Legs

Typically their pose is nonchalant: the twin "Capped-ones" never take part in the action. They seem unable to stand on two feet, but lean with their legs crossed like the Dioskouroi to make them appear like the anthropomorphized One-foots. This perhaps also suggests the entanglement of the fiery spirit encased in the wetness of the mushroom's spongy matter, for they are also both associated with the thunderbolt, the celestial fire, that, like the mushroom, metaphorically bellows like a bull and was commonly considered its generative force.[62] Agave, the mother of Pentheus, heard the same bellowing on Mount Kithairon at the onset of her maenadic rapture in Euripides's *Bacchae*. It was also the sound that Perseus heard as he confronted the Gorgon Me dusa and harvested the sacred mushroom. According to the Persians, during famine manna "sometimes falls from the heaven." Lightning and thunder are said to be indispensable for the growth of mushrooms, which are called *banat-al-ra'd* in Persian, meaning "daughters of the thunder."[63] In Greek mythology, it is the "One-Eyes" called Kylopes who make the thunderbolts of Zeus.[64]

> The land roared with the bellowing of mushrooms.
>
> —Aristias, *Perseus*[65]

Fiery-wet mushrooms sprouting from the lightning bolt is a perfect botanical analogue for the spiritual entanglement of fire in moist matter perhaps symbolized by the crossed-legged twins. Their names denote their essential role as Torchbearers (*dadaphoroi* or *dadouchoi* in Greek), a traditional function as escorts in Mystery initiations. Inevitably, such

Torchbearers would have led the candidates into the subterranean Mithraeum for the ceremonies.

Cautes is named as the "burner," and Cautopates is similarly named, but is his twin's superior, with the additional termination of Old Persian *pat*, meaning "lord."[66] Hence "Fire" and "Lord Fire" both are different aspects of Mithras himself, and recalls the Vedic Varuna-Mitra-Agni triad, where Agni is the diety of fire commonly associated with Soma. As is appropriate to his name as the joiner, Mithras himself occupies the middle between his two attendants.

That the bull secretly represents a mushroom is also indicated by the fact that Mithras sometimes is born from the rock, as in the Dura-Europos fresco, holding not a dagger, but a pruning hook or *harpe* (a curved sword with a straight side barb),[67] and this is the implement that he will employ for the tauroctony. The *harpe* is an agricultural tool used to prune wild plants into a productive cultivated state.

Torchbearer Cautopates with double axe. *Detail of marble statue, Sidon Mithraeum.*

An axe is a more appropriate implement for slaughtering a bull. A pair of marble statues from the Sidon Mithraeum depicts the two attendants, legs uncrossed. Cautopates, identified by his down-thrust torch, wields a double axe, whose blades juxtaposed to his Phrygian cap suggests its mushroom identity.[68]

The prominence of the dagger-harpe in Mithraic art is significant since ordinarily the sacrificial knife had no place in the symbolism of the ritual slaughter—the actual killings were performed by persons of low social status, usually slaves. The prominence of such an implement in Mithraic

iconography indicates that Mithras is not slaughtering an animal, but plucking a sacramental plant.

Even Mithras, like his squires, is a One-foot on the relief from the Saint Aubin Mithraeum as he steps out of a pile of rocks, with one foot hidden, still left behind.[69]

Sometimes Mithras bursts from the rock, like Atlas holding the celestial orb in his hand. This is the rock from which light descends again back to earth, for the vault of heaven was like the vaulted chamber of the Mithraeum.

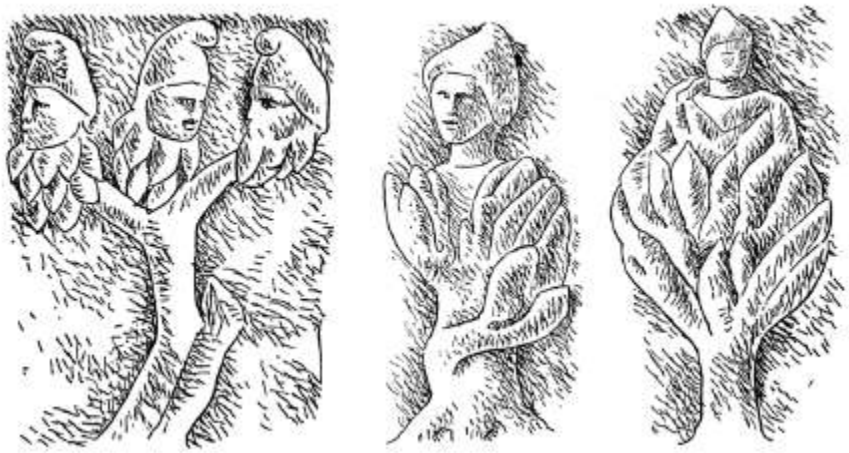
Fruit of the Pine Tree

The rock sometimes identified as a pinecone.[70] A statue from the Carnutum Mithraeum shows Mithras rising out of a conical pile of rocks (as the cone is sometimes depicted) encircled by a serpent, with his hands uplifted into the foliage of the tree behind him.[71] The botanical nature of the transition of the pinecone rock, with its coiling serpent, into the emerging god is seen in the statue from the Bingen Mithraeum, where the base of the naked torso is wreathed with four large flowers.[72]

The *Amanita* mushroom, like the pinecone, is actually a fruit of the tree —the same tree upon which they are mycorrhizally dependent. That is to say, the host tree supports the Amanita mycelium of which the mushrooms are the fruit; since the fruiting bodies do not appear without proximity to a host tree, it is easy to understand why preliterate and prescientific peoples would assume that the mushroom is, in fact, the fruit of the tree. The tree is most frequently a pine or birch, less commonly oak, and the mushrooms have also been reported on eucalyptus, olive, larch, and Asiatic cedars.[73] The fly agaric's dependence upon its host gives it the common folkloric epithet of the "tree-mushroom."[74] Similarly, the mushrooms often become the "apples" of a magical tree since the both fresh and dried *muscaria* closely resemble red apples in their corresponding stages.[75] Thus sometimes the capped heads of Mithras either alone and sometimes with all three persons of the Trinity appear actually *in* the tree, an evergreen pine, hanging as its fruit.[76]

On a sandstone relief of the tauroctony episode, the pinecone is even blatantly revealed as an equivalent of the sheaf of grain and of the Bull as

surrogates for the mushroom entheogen. Cautes, cross-legged and holding his upright torch, rests his left arm on a column and displays the pinecone beside the sheaves of grain sprouting from the dying Bull's tail.[77] The Trinity of the twins and the god is what is called the "tri-form Mithras," for Cautes and Cautopates, too, are gods, sometimes so-labeled each as *deus*, the rising sun, the god at midday, and its evening setting.



Mithras, Cautes, and Cautopates as capped heads in a pine tree (left). *Detail, Kreis-und-Stadtmuseum, Dieburg.* ***Mithras as capped head in a pine tree (center and right).*** *Detail, Frankfurt-Heddernheim, Städtisches Museum, Wiesbaden.*

It should be obvious that the bull of the cult's central myth of the tauroctony was no ordinary animal found here on earth but one with cosmic dimensions in which the god of the sacrificial offering was also himself the offering, as in the Christian Eucharist where the priest is defined as *offerens oblatus*, both "offering and offered," identified as officiating over his own sacrifice. Similarly, the self-oblation in Mithraism ratifies a mediation between the celestial and human realms, a communion in which the worshipper is privileged to participate. Mithras, therefore, displays non-human characteristics of the prime botanical Host, traceable back to the warrior confraternities of the Aryan and Persian nobility. That is to say, he is an anthropomorphized mushroom, just as the Bull is a fungal zoomorphism, including the characteristic red and starry white dichotomy of the red-capped *Amanita muscaria*, its manifestation as a bodily effluent

in the form of its metabolite in urine, its sudden explosive nativity from a rock, its anthropomorphism as a creature with a single operative leg or foot, and its association with a particular host tree as its fruit, such as a pinecone. Further aspects of this symbolism, as we examine in subsequent chapters, will associate Mithras and the Bull with a source of magical waters.

three

The Water Miracle

Water from a Stone

The rock from which the god was born was both wet and derived from water, another clear metaphor for the *Amanita* mushroom, all the more so since the rock was found at the base of a tree and so drenched with water that streams flowed from its source.[1] The head of the water god of the river's spring is seen at the base of the rock mass of the birthing.[2]

Thus the rock nativity was also the water miracle—the god as he burst from the fruiting egg-cave-rock that quickly expanded, absorbing the rainfall from the sudden thunderstorm and bolt of lightning, used his dagger to stab the rock.[3] And behold, from it flowed the stream, an eternal spring, *fons perennis*. Like Soma, which was squeezed to extract its liquor of magical drink, the rock yielded its nectar, and his two Torchbearers were at hand (as at the tauroctony), to be the first to taste it:

> O thou, you fountain confined in the rocks, you who have nourished the twin brothers (Cautes and Cautopates) with your nectar, as the verse painted on the wall of the Santa Prisca Mithraeum proclaimed. (*Fons concluse petris, geminos qui aluisti nectare fratres*.)

In the Ptuj Mithraeum, the rock of the spring is a pinecone; the diminutive twins are present, one eagerly scooping up its precious waters, while the other hugs the god's knees in adoration.[4] The altar commemorates the Eucharistic sacrament, its two other sides depicting the bow, quiver, and dagger, while on the other side, the meal with Sol, the sun.

Christians interpreted this water miracle as equivalent to the transubstantiation of wine into the blood of their god.[5]

> I remember that the priests of the fellow in the cap used at one time to say, "Our Capped one himself is a Christian."
>
> —Augustine[6]

> The Lord said: "Strike the rock; water will pour out of it, and the people shall drink." Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.
>
> —Exodus, 17, 6

> Speak to the rock and it will yield its water. Thus you will produce water for the community out of the rock.
>
> —Numbers, 20, 8

On the sandstone altar fitted as a water container and fountain for the Budapest Mithraeum, the torch-bearing twins stand on either side of a giant *krater*, the ancient container for mixing the wine with water.[7] Water basins or cisterns were part of the equipment in every Mithraeum, like the baptismal font of the Christians. One circular limestone basin with handles and spout from Königshoffen shows traces of red paint perhaps suggesting the color of its liquid contents, like the Bull's blood of the fungal drink.[8] Originally it stood near the entrance beneath a pilaster relief depicting the banquet with Sol. Nearby, a second one, beneath the alliance with Sol, preserves the fragmentary inscription, "Water flows as the promise" (*agua Agua fluit votum*).[9] Often bas-reliefs similarly depict basins overflowing with water.

In the Resca Mithraeum, the god is seen at the moment of his birth with torch and dagger emerging from a pile of rocks resembling a pinecone. Just below his navel is a round opening representing the omphalos or navel of the earth; the statue stood against the wall, connected to a water pipe as a fountain through the aperture.[10]

Similarly, a fragment of a marble statue from Italy depicts the head of a water god at the base of the pinecone rock from which Mithras emerges; the tubing for the fountain let the water spout both from the base and from the missing upper torso of Mithras.[11]

A marble fountainhead from the Carnutum Mithraeum, (present day Austrian Bad Deutsch-Altenberg on the Danube) in the Roman province of

Pannonia equates the water with bull's blood. It depicts a lion lying with a bull's head before its foremost paws, with a large opening communicating with a fountain.[12] The Lion or *Leo* was the fourth stage in the ascending seven-fold grades of initiation. With this grade, the initiate acquired a fiery nature, and the fountainhead indicates that the water has become the fiery Bull sacrament.

The Mithraic birthing scene may have the water god mythologized as Oceanus or Neptune in attendance, for this water is the spring that flows from the base of the Cosmic Mountain, not ordinary water, but the sacramental liquid, the equivalent of the four rivers flowing down from the Tree in the Garden of Eden.[13] Saturn, too, can be there, either with the horns of a water god or with the *harpe* that he will entrust to Mithras for the tauroctony. The heroic labor will usher in another era, and Saturn-Kronos used such a pruning hook or scythe to castrate his father Uranus to move time forward. Thus Mithras could be confused with the god of eternal time as Chronos, the Persian Zervan and the Greek Mystery figure of Aion. It was this realm of eternal time that was the ultimate goal of the ascending grades of initiation.

Bull's Blood

Since the water miracle created the sacred drink, Mithras could sometimes even be seen rising from the rock with a bunch of grapes uplifted in his hand, like a Bacchus-Dionysus. With crossed legs, Cautopates salutes the miracle with clenched hand to his forehead in the ancient gesture of reverence[14] at the epiphany of the sacred water as wine. The association of wine with bull's blood derives on the metaphoric level from the identity of Dionysus as a bull and bull-mushroom but also from the ancient practice, now banned, of using dried bull's blood as a fining agent to help clear the wine of suspended particles and clarify it.[15] The famous potent Hungarian wine known as Bull's Blood (Egri Bikavér or "Bull's Blood of Eger") is named for the tradition that in the siege of Eger in 1552, the Ottoman Turks were told that the "drunken, red-bearded" defenders of the town were preternaturally ferocious because they had drunk bull's blood, a tradition similar to the tales of the berserkers.[16] The bow, quiver, and arrows at the base of the god's torso indicate that the uplifted Dionysian entheogen is a

version of the water miracle.[17] Compare the fresco of Mithras shooting at the rock (as a pile of cloud rocks) in the Dura-Europos Mithraeum.[18]

The grapes unfortunately are a questionable restoration, but the uncharacteristically vigorous upthrust arm is unlike the usual portrayal of his emergence with dagger and torch clasped firmly in his hands on either side. Grapes, moreover, often figure in Mithraic iconography; for example, quite significantly at the banquet with Sol,[19] where the wine probably is actually bull's blood. The grape was considered to contain "Uranian fire" associated with the Lion, and wine was appropriately stored in fired clay, instead of stone containers.[20]

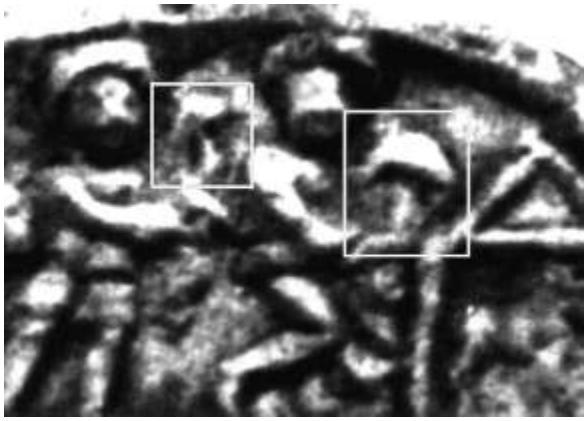
The upthrust arm with the bunch of grapes should probably be compared to depictions of Mithras's rock birth emergence with the celestial globe in his upheld hand, a sphere sometimes indistinguishable from a pinecone.[21] Similarly, the rock birth can depict Mithras emerging with a sheaf of grain replacing the torch or globe pinecone in his uplifted hand, thus equating the rock birth and water miracle with the tauroctony.[22]

Since the water miracle produced the fiery potion of bull's blood, the assimilation with Dionysus is expectable, especially since ancient wine was not a simple alcoholic drink but fortified with a variable mixture of inebriants from sources other than the grape.[23] The wine manufactured from the juice of the cultivated vine, moreover, was seen as a controlled fungal growth, contrasted with the wild toxic plants and symbolized by the ivy, that represented the other half of the god's nature, among them being the sacred mushroom. Thus on a statue base from the Poetovio (Pettau, Petuj) Mithraeum in Slovenia, the *krater-kantharus* is flanked by the leopards emblematic of Dionysus and the contents of the mixing urn-drinking cup are indicated metaphorically by the fruiting grape vine.[24] On each side, the motif of the vine sprouting from the vessel is repeated.

So too, the sacred meal with Sol can be depicted with the foods identified as the Eucharistic bread and a bunch of grapes, instead of bull's flesh and blood.[25] The Torchbearers, moreover, are also associated with the Dionysian surrogate; on a relief from Dieburg, Cautes and Cautopates are standing upon *kraters* on either side of the tauroctony.[26] And from Aquincum III (now part of Budapest), there is a fountain, with the twins flanking an amphora.[27]

The tauroctony and the water miracle are the same event, merely separated sometimes into two narrative mythological episodes. Thus Mithras can shoot arrows at the pinecone water rock of his birth and the fountainhead of the Bull sacrament. Similarly, on a marble altar from Poetovia, Mithras strikes the rock with his bow and arrow, while Cautes and Cautopates drink from the spring or embrace his legs.[28]

A tauroctony relief from Dacia puts all the elements together: Mithras, with bow in hand, shoots his arrow at a rock, actually a temple within which is the Bull, while a kneeling person before the rock-temple holds an object that can only be described as mushroom-shaped in his hand.[29]



A kneeling person (perhaps Cautes or Cautopates) and attendant hold mushrooms. Detail of *tauroctony relief from Dacia.*

Thirsting Souls

The ideal Mithraeum was a natural cave with a source of water in it or nearby,[30] for the coolness of water was what seduced the descent of the fiery spirit into its entanglement in matter. The sound of gurgling water channeled through the Mithraeum was a distinctive element in its psychological indoctrination.

> Souls settle down to water … and in brief, it must be known to all whomsoever that souls flying to water are souls descending into birth.
>
> —Porphyrius[31]

The association with water survives in Kurdish tradition, where Mithras is closely associated with sacred springs and lakes.[32] Etymologically, Mithras can be seen as the bringer of water, lakes, and springs. *Mahur* in Parsi means "harmony, the sound of water." *Menhur* is an Egyptian "mystical divinity" of The Flood.[33] A temple of Mithras-Anahita was named as the place of "many springs."

In the Mithraeum, the water represented the initial stage, which was the incarnation or the entrapment of spirit in matter, a slumbering like onto death, whereas as the stages of initiation progressed the water became the fiery drink of the bull sacrament aspiring to the transcendent release and return of the spirit back to the Empyrean. The effect of ingesting *Amanita* includes feverishness, with increased or even extreme sweating and salivation—as if one had indeed "swallowed fire"[34] and ingested the solar disk. Effects also include the induction of peaceful lethargy or sleep characterized by lucid feelings of intensified strength and vigor or bellicosity, such as was exhibited by the berserker warriors of Nordic tradition. As with all entheogens, effects vary from person to person and even from experience to experience when revisiting the same entheogen. Some useful generalizations regarding the progression of *Amanita muscaria* effects are, however, published at Erowid.org: the opening stages are marked by nausea and other physical responses as outlined above. This stage is often followed by a relaxed, dreamy sedation, after which "psychedelic" effects begin to manifest—which include (but are not limited to) increased vigor and perception, internal psychological dialogue, synesthesia, and, most importantly, the experience of spiritual ecstasy and mystical union.

Clark Heinrich described his waking vision as illumination and transcendence:

> Before another thought could arise in my mind, in the midst of a great darkness and a great silence, the heavens opened above my head. In an instant I was flooded with light from above, light of the utmost whiteness and splendor, that quickly dissolved everything in its glory…. I was taken up and absorbed by the unspeakable Godhead. No longer separate, there was neither an enjoyer nor a thing enjoyed; there was union.[35]

Life in the Empyrean

The fall of the fiery thunderbolt encased in the moistness of the spongy fungus that it births could not be a better metaphor for the incarnation and the aspiration through initiation to release the fire back to the heavens to be reunited with the burning Empyrean of the godhead that surrounds the rim of the Cosmos.

Everyone can see that flames leap upward, fire ascends, and heat rises. Matter in combustion releases energy and disappears into clouds of smoke. It is only natural to assume that the fire will continue its heavenward journey to the ultimate boundary. This is the edge of the universe. Beyond that, it can go no further. There it gathers into the fiery sphere surrounding the Cosmos. This realm is the Empyrean, the highest heaven. It is the final repository of all life and the blazing source of light. All other illumination and newer forms of life are derived from it, through the intermediary of particulate bits of light, lesser and greater as the Sun and the Moon, planets and stars, arranged in ascending order as gateways both up and down. The continuing recycling of the sparks of light is seen in the glowing arch of the Milky Way, the galaxy, as the Greeks called it. It is a river of milk or *gala*, but it is not ordinary milk, for it is a stream of fire and to drink of it confers divinity. It flowed from the breast of a goddess, either Hera, the wife of Zeus, or Rhea, his mother. In the latter case, Rhea used it to nourish a stone that she had substituted for her baby, whereas in the former, Hera was tricked into offering it to the infant Herakles. But either way, it escaped and flowed into the sky. Or alternatively its source is the zoomorphic manifestation of the goddess as a herd of dairy cows. They are often misleadingly called “cattle.” They are red and belong to the Sun, who drives through the sky in a chariot drawn by solar bulls.[36] Their color is not derived from the reflected twilight but from the fiery nature of the mushroom for which they are the metaphor.[37]

This river of entheogenic milk is the pathway of the souls rising in the west upon death through the planetary gates to the Empyrean, and then descending along the same arching bow on its eastern half for the incarnation of birth. It passes through the constellation of the Twins, Gemini, who are the Dioscouroi, Castor, and Polydeuces—one mortal and the other immortal. This Empyreal realm is the Oversoul, the common

home, of which each bit of life and every numinous entity is but a particle. As light, it is the source of Gnosis, the repository of knowledge.

Just as the mushroom as fungus is denoted metaphorically as a rocklike terrestrial sponge for its thirsting absorption of water, encasing the celestial power of the fallen lightning bolt in the moisture of matter, the Mithraeum sanctuaries replicated this paradigm of the fiery incarnation in their subterranean chambers. The first stage in the return to the realm of the soul in the Empyrean was the water miracle that released the water from the rock as the intoxicating blood of the bull potion. The traditions of bull's blood, moreover, as we shall see, are understandable only as metaphoric of a magical drink that programs an initiatory experience of death and resurrection.

four

Death by Bull's Blood

The Athenian Themistocles, who had led the victorious Greek forces against the Persian King Xerxes in the battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, later fell from power and was banished from the city. Upon the death of Xerxes, he petitioned his son and successor Artaxexes for asylum and assistance and became involved in Persian intrigues. He was awarded governership of the region of Magnesia-on-the-Maeander in Asia Minor and died there in 462. The grateful subjects of his province erected a statue of him as a god in their marketplace as the "bull-slayer," standing nude in the act of pouring a libation over an altar, below which lay the slain bull. The same image was also placed on their coinage. It was rumored that he had committed suicide by drinking bull's blood[1] or some other poison,[2] although bull's blood is obviously not poisonous.[3]

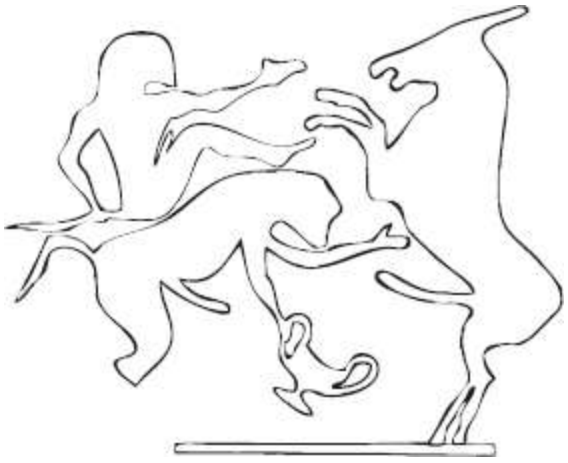
Not poisonous, but apparently intoxicating. In Aristophanes's *Knights*, the two slaves of the "Blustering" (*Paphlagon*) "Dealer in Bull-hides" (*Bursopoles*), the demagogue Cleon, attempt to drown their sorrows with bull's blood, which will inspire them with some bright idea, some comic stratagem, and embolden them for courageous action (80 *et seq.*):

—The best thing is for us to die.
—Yeah, but think. How could we die most—*manfully?*
—How? How could it be most—*manfully?*
—The best way for us is to drink—*bull's blood*. The death of Themistocles—that's what we want.
—Yeah, but drink it—straight for good luck!
—OK—straight. Your turn now? Get drunk! We need a plan.
—Hey, what's wrong with you? Are you a teetotaler? Come on now, that's not enough. Drink up! Do you find anything to complain

about this wine for its—thought content? You won't find a better wine for results. You see, whenever men drink like this, that's how they get ahead in the world: they get rich, they get things done, they win law cases, they are happy, they are good for their friends. So, quick, give me a cup of wine. Let me give my mind a drink and I'll tell you what our plan is.

A Dealer in Hides

The hide-seller, by the way, is a joke. Cleon is parodied as a dealer in dildos, appropriately phallic for the mushroom-derived "bull's-blood" entheogen, or he is even the "leather" item himself (*Burospaphlagon*, "Blustering-leather"), pandering to the anally receptive populace. Their bright idea is to promote the career of someone even baser, the sausage-seller, who will offer the populace not a dildo, but the real thing. Phallic imagery, as is expected in Old Comedy, abounds. For the two slaves have just before this "drink" tried to assuage their troubles by "coming" ("to come by oneself" is a pun on deserting). They are costumed with the comic phallus, and there was never need for more stage apparatus or props than the lasivious imagination, to enact "coming" (masturbation), or "drinking someone off" (fellatio).



Drawing off the Bull's Blood Straight. *Drunken ithyphallic silen riding another who is holding the god's kantharos drinking cup and drawing off the bull's blood potion from the phallus of a mule.*

A common metaphor for the genitals was the wine sack, and the penis was called a mushroom. Hence they were drinking the bull's blood wine straight from each other's phallic apparatus, thus the emphasized "manfully"—a real man's drink! Incidentally, this homoeroticism, as Aristophanes claims, is the way to get ahead in Athens, get rich, and succeed.

The comedy demonstrates that knowledge of the *visionary* Mithraic entheogen was commonplace in fifth-century Athens, and that Aristophanes and his audience knew the secret of its metabolite in urine. The drink looked like a mushroom or erect penis and appears to have been Persian in origin among the aristocracy, a peculiarly "Magnesiam malady," as Nepos put it.[4] Thus Pliny, on the authority of Nicander, links the toxicity of fungi with bull's blood, both of which supposedly can be alleviated with the juice of the radish, presumably as an emetic.[5]

The Death of Choice

The great Carthaginian general Hannibal also chose the bull's blood drink to end his life in 183 BCE.[6] He, like Themistocles, sought asylum in the Persian lands under King Prusias of Bithynia. It appears that he may actually have taken his dose in an underground chamber since he was said to have dug tunnels in various directions as potential escape routes from his castle in Lybissia. Seven tunnels, in fact, as seven corresponds to the levels of Mithraic initiation, being the number associated with visionary experience throughout Eurasia since remotest antiquity.[7] The escape routes are an encrypted account of his initiation by his royal host.

Even before Themistocles, the Egyptian Psammenitus, son of Amasis, had chosen this Persian drink of bull's blood to end his life while in the custody of Cambyses II (Kambujiya), son of Cyrus the Great (Kurash), son of Cambyses I and descendant of the founder of the Achaemenid Persian dynasty.[8]

King Midas

Bull's blood seems to have been a visionary intoxicant that conferred divinity or enthronement and induced something metaphorically like an

(ecstatic) death, perhaps in underground chambers, and was apt to be drunk by Persian royalty, their foreign guests, and converts to Mithraism. In appearance, the potion could resemble the wine sack of the genitals or a phallic mushroom. One need only recall the mythical prophecy that the father of the hero Theseus received from the Delphic oracle about not untying the wine sack until he got back home to Athens.

We can go even further if we enter the world of myth. King Midas drank it.[9] Midas attended the famous musical contest between Apollo and the satyr Marsyas and disagreed with the verdict that gave the victory to Apollo, for which reason the god punished him by making him grow the ears of an ass—which he hid beneath his Mithraic Persian cap! But when his barber discovered and divulged the secret, Midas drank the bull's blood potion. Despite his mythological identity, his actual tomb, at Gordion in central Turkey, has been excavated. (Midas and Gordius were actually dynastic names and there was a succession of figures with these names.) A Midas was laid to rest with more than 100 vessels from his funeral feast around 700 BCE, leaving intriguing chemical residues of what was drunk and eaten by the guests at this final celebration.[10]

The preliminary results of the chemical analysis on the residue from the vessels for the funeral feast of King Midas indicate some kind of barley beverage. Since the vessels were buried with the corpse and since the king was reputed to have mounted a huge shamanic expedition to the Hyperboreans,[11] we might well expect that the sanctity with which the vessels were treated derived from a sacramental food for the royal ritual in which the guests escorted the king to his final resting place. Attempts to test for ergot-related toxins in the barley residue have thus far not been undertaken, nor any investigation into other possible visionary substances.

Midas is better known for his "golden touch." The drunken Silenus, the old tutor of Dionysus, had been found asleep in his gardens, and to win his release, had told him of the Hyperboreans. To this paradise, Midas mounted a great expedition, reportedly the greatest ever attempted. Dionysus rewarded Midas with the golden touch. Since it was Dionysus who gave it to him, we might well suspect that it was an "intoxicant" and perhaps a "golden" one at that. As for his people, they were "bulls" (Moschians), and he was enthroned as king as the adopted heir to Gordius, whose sign of divine enthronement had been the famous Gordion knot on a bull cart that

conferred the rulership over all of Asia on whomever could untie it. Alexander would later lay claim to dominion over Asia by cutting it through with his sword.

Ergo

The Phrygian cap beneath which Midas tried to hide his ass's ears and his "suicidal" drink of bull's blood suit the metaphoric complex for the fly agaric and the *haoma* sacrament. This Indo-Iranian tradition, however, was sometimes transmuted into another fungal surrogate, an ergot-related drink, as in the sacramental visionary potion of the Eleusinian *kykeon*. This was ritualized as a cultivated version of the Amanita, which figured in the symbolism and ritual of the Lesser Mystery and at other sanctuaries of Demeter and Persephone, in a pattern that balanced the wild mushroom with the ergot or *Claivceps purpurea* that is parasitic on cultivated grains.[12] Thus the slaughtered Mithraic Bull sprouts a sheaf of barley for a tail.

The sclerotia of *Claviceps purpurea* enlarges the infested kernels, making them stick out from the sheaf of barley or other grain like horns, the cockle of a rooster, or perhaps "ass's ears." Actually the tolerantly edible mushroom *Otidea onotica*, which ranges in color from yellow-orange to red purple, is commonly called "ass's ears" for its shape and similarity to the reddish tinge of the donkey's ears. Its resemblance to the ergot is remarkable, and the Midas myth suggests that the same metaphor might have figured as a common name for the ergot as well since the king's ass's ears are botanical, as the continuation of the myth demonstrates, and related to grasses. These distinctive ears of a donkey have lent their name also to various other plants, such as comfrey in Spanish.[13]

Medea's Potion

Aeson drank it,[14] as did his son Jason, the hero who had sought the Golden Fleece and sowed the dragon-teeth men, which were other metaphors for fly agaric.[15] Sometimes it caused death: other times it produced rejuvenation and renewed life. Apparently the sorceress Medea knew how to concoct it from plants.[16] She came from the eastern end of the Black Sea, and the Greeks acknowledged their consanguinity with the Persians in the mythical

tradition that her son by the king of Athens was the ancestral founder of the Medes, named after him, a tribal group of the Persians. Dioscorides[17] and Pliny also knew that the potion was herbal and not made from bull's blood, except metaphorically.

Fly-killer

The bull's blood potion was not poisonous at all but rather a curative and stimulant and, like the fly agaric, a supposed insecticide for flies.

According to Aelian, the Egyptian god Serapis (Osiris-Apis), a vegetative deity ritually identified with a bull, cured a certain Chresimus of tuberculosis with a drink of bull's blood. The meat of the ass was equally effective.[18] Tubercu losis is essentially a problem with breathing and would lend itself quite naturally as metaphoric in the life and death scenario. Thus, on another occasion, Serapis cured the Cretan Básilis by prescribing that he eat only ass meat. Bull's blood and ass meat appear to be equivalent like the Eucharistic bread and wine, Blood and Body of the deity. Apis is the incarnation of Ptah.[19] Ptah is one of the "tiny-giant" deities, like the Greek Great Gods of Samothrace. Herodotus mentions that Cambyses was amused by the images of Ptah that he saw in the god's temple in Memphis for they were *pataeci*,[20] phallic, genie-spirit, gnome-headed dwarfs, like the mythical pygmies. These swollen-headed ithyphallic little-big creatures were, quite simply, anthropomorphized mushrooms.[21] The alternation in size of these creatures from pygmies to giants is a mythical expression of the shifting visual micropsia and macropsia experienced by those who have ingested the consciousness-altering mushroom.[22]

Earlier, Aelian had recorded another very interesting event where bull's blood also intervenes.[23] During the celebration of the Olympic games, the flies of the region make a pact, as it were, like an Olympic truce, with the visitors and country people. So many bulls are sacrificed, with so much blood poured out and so much meat hung up, that the flies voluntarily disappear and go to the opposite bank of the River Alpheus. This, of course, is paradoxical, since the blood and bull's flesh should have attracted the flies.

In another passage, Aelian returns to the subject of flies.[24] On the peninsula-like island of Leukas (Lefkhadia), there is a high promontory

with a temple dedicated to Apollo called the Temple of the Coast. During the celebration of the pilgrimage when the devotees leap from the high white cliff in honor of the god, they sacrifice a cow for the flies, which glut themselves upon the blood and disappear. The dangerous leap, moreover, was often fatal. Sappho was said to have committed suicide there. A voluntary leap is obviously a pacified version of human sacrifice, which typically would have involved a sacramental potion, and thus Silenos yearns to take the leap after drinking the most potent of Apolline wines. The sacrament either prepared the victim joyously to accept the inevitability of his fate or to strengthen his resolve to attempt the feat.[25]

We might recall that one of the epithets of Apollo in Olympia and Arcadia was "fly-catcher" (*muiagros*).[26] *Amanita muscaria* is so-called precisely because of its involvement with flies, which are attracted to its juice and are intoxicated, appearing to die, only to come back again to life. The dried red caps, submerged in water, yield a bloody golden red drink. It is this that Aelian, probably naively in a garbled version, reported as the bull's blood and flesh which is so paradoxically efficacious against flies.

As with the leap, the actual role of the bull's blood at Olympia was probably not as a fly repellent or insecticide but as a stimulating entheogen involved in the athletic rites. The Olympic games were celebrated in the month of Hecatombeon (July–August), too early for the fly agaric to have fruited in the mountains or on the forested Kronion Hill within the sanctuary,[27] but the dried caps from the previous autumn is all that would be needed. In addition to its consciousness-altering properities, fly agaric also acts as a stimulant. Thus it would appear efficacious in the treatment of tuberculosis, a disease that produces a profound debility, which would be temporarily alleviated by such a stimulant. As such, it was employed in the ancient Scandinavian warrior cult of the berserkers. Despite the anti-doping problem of the modern Olympics, it is probable that the ancient religious context of athleticism at Olympia made the opposite appropriate.

Bull's blood is simply incapable of causing a fatal poisoning. Instead, we have seen that it could be drunk obscenely as a dramatized burlesque of fellatio on the comic stage of Classical Athens in the form of an inspiring undiluted winelike effluent from a mushroom penis in a context of male homoerotic bonding. It was associated with Persian traditions and orchestrated a sevenfold ascent from a subterranean imprisonment; an

experience afforded several elite military rulers who were friends or guests of the Persian royalty. Moreover, it seems likely that with the metaphor of ass's ears, the visionary extract from ergot, *Claviceps purpurea*, which is also a fungal growth, could be substituted for *Amanita muscaria*. Its color was apparently as much golden as it was red; and this drinkable gold could access a journey that can only be identified as metaphysical or shamanic, either to the utopian world of the Hyperboreans or or as a funeral celebration to the land of the dead. It was also metaphorically the Fleece of a Golden Ram. As with the battle fury it induced in warriors, it was associated with Olympian athletes. Furthermore, it displays its folkloric involvement with the fly, as in its common name of fly agaric, in its association with Apollo and elite tribal Greek militarism. In fact, as we shall see, the Mithraic sacrament is a fundamental aspect of the Greek mythological traditions of heroism.

five

Mushrooms, Gorgons, and the Spring of Perseus

Perseus and the Water Miracle

The Mithraic cult appears not to have taken hold in Classical Greece.[1] Mithraea have been uncovered so far only in Argos, Patras, Eleusis, Athens, and on the island of Andros, perhaps hosting primarily foreign memberships. This is probably not surprising because Classical Greece had its own water miracles performed beneath the citadels of its oldest cities. In fact, the Roman cult of Mithraism most likely fused the Greek cult of Perseus and the Persian cult of Mithras to become perhaps the most sophisticated religion of the Hellenic world, at the forefront of astronomy and philosophical thought.

> Perseus founded Mycenae. For on its site the cap (*mukes*) fell from his scabbard, and he regarded this as a sign to found a city. I have also heard the following account. He was thirsty, and the thought occurred to him to pick up a mushroom (*mukes*) from the ground. Drinking with joy water that flowed from it, he gave to the place the name of Mycenae.
>
> —Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.16.3

Perseus created the Perseion spring in the cave beneath Mycenae when he harvested a mushroom to quench his thirst. This plucking of the mushroom cap or head was synonymous with the harvesting of the Gorgon since there was also the tradition that this hill was one of the places that the "bellowing Medousa" landed.[2] The name that he gave to the city was a reinterpretation of the place of the Mykene sisterhood as Mushroom-town, named both for the "mushroom" (*mukes*) and the "bellowing" (*mukema*) of the Gorgons. This was a locally preserved antiquarian version of a myth that was better known as decapitation of the Medusa. A similar "bellowing" associated Perseus and the Medusa to the naming of Mykalessos on Mount Mykale in Asia Minor,

where there was also a sacred spring.[3] She was the queen of the Gorgon sisterhood, bearded female monsters with bulging cheeks and lolling tongues, with the ears, nose, and tusks of sows, and serpents for hair.

Of particular relevance to the role of the mushroom in the Mithraic initiation is a garbled and rationalized version of Medusa's decapitation preserved by the fifth–sixth-century chronographer John Malalas. He claims that Medusa was actually a woman of such stunning beauty that she turned viewers into stone (i.e., that they went into a trance). Perseus cut off her head and then used it as a "skull-cup" (*skyphos*) to teach the rite of Zoroaster to the Persians, who took the name of Medes (Medoi) in honor of the Medusa.[4] A similar tradition is preserved by the eleventh century Byzantine historian Greogorios Kedrenos (or George Cedrenus). He claims that Perseus brought celestial fire to the earth, deposited it in a temple, where it was called sacred immortal fire, and instituted the priesthood of the Magi as its guardians and protectors, instructing them in Mystery rites of initiation.[5] This terrestrial incarnation of the celestial fire is a common botanical metaphor.

Actually, however, her homeland appears to have been in northern Libya in the region of the now dry bed of former Lake Triton, where they all were mermaids, sometimes depicted with the lower body as a fish, and were associated with water. In all these traditions, she is a version of the ubiquitous Great Goddess, who will be replaced by Athena when Perseus cuts off her head. Athena will henceforth wear it as an ornament upon her breastplate, turning Medusa ugly to protect men from her terrible allure. Although ubiquitous, Medusa's association with water is still venerated in that region of Libya.[6]

That region was one of the places where Perseus found her, at the base of the looming Atlas Mountains or across the straits below the rock of Gibraltar. In this version of the tale, she and her water nymph sisters were in the blessed westernmost Garden of the Hesperides. Here grew the Tree with the Golden Apples. An amphora of the Classical period from southern Italy or Magna Grecia locates the plucking of the water mushroom here instead of at Mycenae and equates the picking of the mushroom with the harvesting of the fungal-shaped head of the Medusa as one of those golden apples.[7] Such vases from southern Italy have survived because they were placed in tombs and they testify to versions of the myth that would have had special occult significance for the deceased.

However the tale was told, like Mithras, Perseus always uses a pruning hook instead of a warrior's weapon to confront Medusa, and when he harvests her mushroom head, she gives birth to Pegasus, a flying ecstatic horse named for the springs (*pegai*) that flowed whenever he touched the earth. These were not, however, fountains of water but entheogenic liquids, imparting inspired wisdom to whomever drank from them. And at the same time, she gave birth to the horse's twin Chrysaor, who is the version of Perseus himself in his state of consubstantiality with the sacrament. His name means the "Golden Pluck," often interpreted as a sword, but only metaphorically a sword and in this case the pruning hook or the plucked Golden Apple. A recent comprehensive study of the Medusa and Perseus fails to even mention the hero's harvesting of the mushroom and hence completely overlooks the significance of the *harpe* as the hero's weapon.[8]

From Mushroom to Olive

Once the botanical head has been harvested, it always changes into the olive tree as a surrogate for the original plant. By annual pruning, it can be forced from its wild state into the cultivated gnarled trunk that produces olives as its fruit. Hence the pruning is emblematic of the triumph of cultivation over primitivism, and the olive wreath is symbolic of victory and peace.

Another vase from southern Italy depicts Hermes, Athena, and Perseus contemplating the Gorgon head reflected in a shield at the base of an olive tree growing through it. The olive has been reported as one of the trees that host the *Amanita muscaria*.[9] The same transmutation of mushroom to olive is added as an annotation to the hero's consubstantial state beside his red-spotted Phrygian cap. It should be noted that Perseus here and in the vase above is not wearing the *petasos* cap worn by Hermes. It was traditional that Hermes lent him the *petasos*, often with wings attached, to facilitate his encounter with the Medusa. In fact, it should be noted that in both of these vases, whether the spotted cap is annotated by the adjacent mushrooms (as the golden apples) or by the transmutation into the olive, the cap is winged as an indication of Perseus's ecstatic state.[10] This version of the cap is apparently depicted as the cap of Hades, lent him by Hermes.[11] This cap of Hades is associated with altered perception, supposedly rendering its wearer invisible (which is not the case with Perseus) and wise, and it is also worn by the

goddess Athena,[12] who is in turn the pacified transmutation of the harvested Gorgon-head.

The "cap of invisibility" is thematically synonymous with the *kibisis* satchel in which Perseus placed the harvested head. A Byzantine lexicographer records that this strange item was actually something like a food pouch, suggesting that Perseus must have eaten the head.[13] Moreover, the "invisibility" theme continues in Perseus's ruse with the three gray swan-sisters, the Graeae, who have only a single "visionary eye" and act as guardians for the final entrance into the Medusa's cave.

It is, in fact, the "eye" of the Medusa that is the essence of her power. It is an eye that darkens sight[14] and threatens death, although she is characterized by the sharp penetrating brilliance of her own sight.[15] Thus the Gorgon-head was a common apotropaic emblem, and once Perseus harvests it, it becomes the essence of his power as a hero. As the *baskanion* or "evil eye" it was an amulet of witchery and expressed the visionary potential of a *pharmakon* or drug.[16]

Although Perseus sometimes wears the same narrow brimmed skullcap or *petasus* worn by Hermes, he more frequently wears the Phrygian cap. Notice also that he and Hermes both lean on pillars with their legs crossed, like Cautes and Cautopates, and he is always depicted as impersonating Hermes.

Perseus with his red-spotted Phrygian cap and the Gorgon head as a mushroom, both transmuted into the olive. *Apulian re-figure pelike, Museo Nazionale, Taranto.*

His name probably is the same root that occurs in the Goddess Persephone, as the one who has displaced or pacified the Titan Perse or Perseis,[17] the netherworld bride of the sun Helios. Folk etymology derived the latter from the verbal root *perthein*, "to destroy," as a goddess of the dead, although Persephone with such early variants as Pherrephatta may actually

mean “thresher of the sheaves of grain.”[18] Nevertheless, the Greeks derived the name of the Persians from Perseus. Perseus was a Persian Perses.

The Medusa’s association with water persisted in Byzantine lore, where she became the mermaid Gorgona, the sister of Alexander the Great, swimming the seas in search of her brother and sinking the ship of anyone who told her of his death. In another version of the myth, Alexander killed the serpent-maiden who guarded the magical water of immortality. When he brought it back, his sister Thessalonica watered some plants, and they became perennial.

The mermaid Gorgona became the rich medieval tradition of the mushroom fairy Melusina who meets her chosen knight at a fountain of thirst and empowers him, sometimes peopling the uninhabited forest floor with his tribe of suddenly fruiting autochthonous creatures and granting him felicity as long as he never spies on her bathing, when she must reveal that she has the bottom of a fish or serpent.[19] In this form, she can be traced back to the myth of the nymph of Scythia, the serpent-maiden Echidna, a sister of the Gorgons. Herakles encountered her after he plucked the Golden Apple and together they peopled the land. The Scythians commemorated their mushroom origin by wearing golden disk-shaped drinking saucers on their belts.[20]

Barbarians

Mithras was only one way that the mushroom cult reached Greece; and in its particular Zoroastrian dogma, prominent foreigners who were entertained by the Persian aristocracy were being initiated long before the cult reached Rome. Alexander himself was probably initiated into the Brahman version of the sacrament when he reached India.[21]

Perseus, in fact, is cited as having performed the same Mycenaean foundation ritual for the fifteenth-century BCE Hittite city of Tarsus in Cilicia, otherwise known as an early center of Mithraism.[22] Perseus was also reputed to have founded Iconion (Turkish Konya) and to have set up an image (icon) of himself holding the Gorgon head, after which icon the city was named. As for the name of the city of Tarsus, according to Nonnus (fifth century CE) it was supposedly derived from the hero’s foot or *tarsos*, apparently just a Single-foot![23]

Actually, there were three routes for the spread of a mushroom cult into the Greco-Roman world. In addition to the obvious contact with ancient

Persia beyond Mesopotamia, the route delineated for the transfer of the secret Hyperborean offering to Delos appears to commemorate the migration of the Siberian Indo-Europeans, namely above the Black Sea through Scythia, up the Danube, then south along the Balkan shore of the Adriatic, and eastward through Dodona and across the Thessalian plain, before finally going south through Theban Euboea, and east across the adjacent islands to Delos. This is hardly a direct route from Scythia and the nomadic Issedonians who dwelled in the slopes of the Altai Mountains, beyond which lay the Hyperborean people of myth, the first of which being the anthropomorphized one-eyed mushrooms called Arimaspeans.[24] The same route underlies Herakles's encounter with Echidna as the nymph of Scythia. Contact with Libya and the prehistorical mushroom shamanism richly documented by the petroglyphs of the Algerian Tassili-n'Ajjer plateau and southern Egyptian El-Hosh as a third route is indicated by Athena's Gorgon origins from Lake Triton and Perseus's harvest of the Golden Apples in the Atlas Mountains. Entheogenic cults would have been known as well from contact with Egypt itself and the importation of its Mystery religions. In fact, the Indo-European migration into Europe apparently encountered indigenous versions of their own shamanism already in existence.[25]

The reason that Mithraism made little headway in Greece of the Classical period was simply that Greece had its own mushroom cults, among them the great Eleusinian Mystery, and before the expanded horizons of the poly-ethnic Hellenistic Age, it was prejudiced against unnecessary foreign importations. Thus, the two Persian invasions at the beginning of the fifth century were seen as the ultimate threat to Hellenic culture by non-Greek-speaking foreigners or "barbarians," as they called them, despite the fact that the Persians and the Greeks were originally consanguineous Indo-Europeans.

This shared heritage is commemorated by the fact that Perses, or "Persian," was the son of Perseus and the African Andromeda. He was either left with his grandfather to be raised and eventually become the ancestor of the kings of Persia, or else he founded the Perseid dynasty at Mycenae, which was replaced by Atreus and his sons.

Thus Perseus appears to have become a doublet for Mithras himself, and the two names are on occasion interchangeable.[26] The similarity of the mushroom water miracles has up to now been overlooked, although others

have often noted that both Mithras and Perseus avert their gaze from the monster as they wield their pruning hooks.[27]

In addition to wearing the distinctive empowering spotted Persian cap, Perseus experienced the same sudden emergence from a subterranean chamber upon his birth, his even more mushroom-like since it began with the fall of golden rain. Mithras and Atlas, moreover, are similar in holding the celestial globe as the cosmic Pillar of Heaven,[28] a common metaphor for the Soma plant, and Perseus was responsible for turning Atlas into such a pillar by showing him the fungal Gorgon head. In fact, the cap-head or *gorgoneion* originally was the only way that the Gorgon was depicted; the fully anthropomorphized body was a later development.[29]

Perseus as a Persian in Greek traditions is interchangeable with Mithras. The Gorgon Medusa, to put it as simply as possible, is blatantly identifiable as an anthropomorphized zoomorphism of the mushroom, comparable to the harvested bull of the tauroctony. Like Mithras, Perseus is a self-sacrifice in which the victim and the agent of the sacrifice both bear metaphoric connotations of the plant that mediates their identity. Just as the Medusa is transmuted into the goddess Athena, the mushroom becomes pacified as her prime botanical attribute, the olive tree.

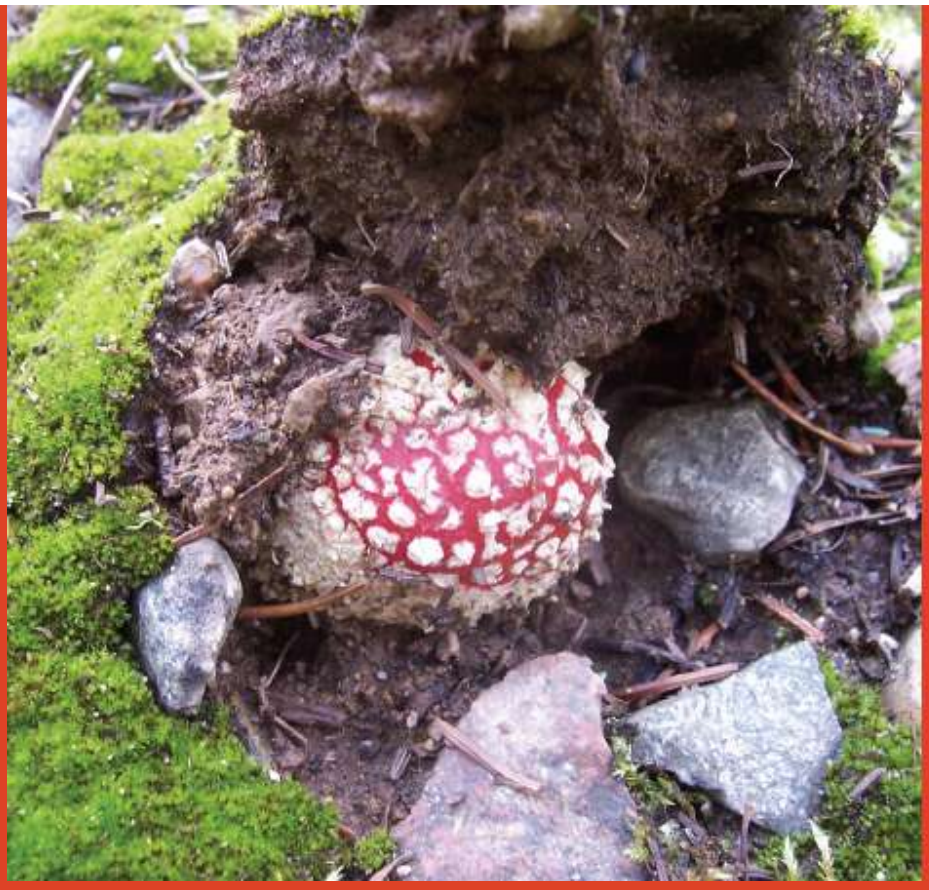
San Marino Taurocthony (p. 42).

Dura Europos, ‘mushroom’ altar Taurocthony (p. 42).

The speckled cap of Mithras (p. 47).

Mithras, with his cap and cape (p. 47).

The speckled cap of Mithras (p. 47).



Petra genetrix, who cuts through the mountain and shines forth (pp. 53–58).

7.

The Sun born of a pinecone (pp. 53–58).

8.

Mithras, born from a stone, The rock that gave birth to God (pp. 53–58).

DÉCLARATION
DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
ET DU CITOYEN
PRÉAMBULE.
ARTICLE PREMIER.
II.
III.
IV.
V.
VI.
VII.
VIII.
IX.
X.
XI.
XII.
XIII.
XIV.
XV.
XVI.
XVII.
AUX REPRESENTANS DU PEUPLE FRANCOIS

10.

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man, with detail of the Phrygian cap, atop a spear and with the cap encircled by the uroboros. This homologue of the Mithraic sacrament, Amanita muscaria, rising among an evergreen garland, includes a representation of both the mushroom's skirtlike annulus veil remnant and the bulbous base in addition to other entheogenic symbolism. Sophia, depicted as an angel (top right, figure 9), points to the mushroom homologue with her left hand (p. 217).

six

Attis under the Same Cap

Emasculation

The great goddess of Anatolia combined everything within herself, including good and evil and male and female. She was born a hermaphrodite from a rock when heavenly semen fell to Earth. So great was her power that the gods conspired to divide her into male and female parts. This they did by turning a spring into wine, and when she fell into a drunken slumber, they tied her male genitals to its other limbs. When startled suddenly from her sleep, she leapt up in fright, tearing off her male organs. Where the severed parts fell upon the ground, either the almond tree sprouted or the pomegranate. As the myth became assimilated to Hellenic traditions, the Greek gods were incorporated into the drama, and Zeus became identified as its parent and Dionysus as the one who turned the water into wine.

The hermaphroditic creature had taken its name from the rock of its birth, called Agdos, actually a meteorite or *baetylus* on Mount Dindymus, above the Anatolian city of Pessinus, the capital of Phrygia, where the Midas dynasty ruled. The city was named in commemoration of this divinely "fallen" rock. Now that Anatolia had become female, she was called Cybele, and from her severed parts came Attis, her son and consort.

For the Greeks, this was the myth of the primordial race of spherical creatures who were of three sexes—male, female, and hermaphrodite—and were split in two like halves of an egg or fruit to produce our present condition of sexuality, in which we yearn to repair the separation, with the divided hermaphrodite being the origin of heterosexuality, and the other two of male and female homosexuality. The original spherical female partook of the Earth in its nature; the male, of the Sun; and the hermaphrodite, of the Moon.[1]

It also is the pattern of the androgynous Earth procreating the world all by herself until she produced her complete opposite, the male Sky or Uranus, after which the procreation proceeds by the heterosexual copulation of the two of them, although without any child coming to birth until she counsels her son Cronus to separate the two of them by severing his father's genitals with the *harpe* pruning hook.[2]

> Sky lay upon Earth spreading himself full upon her. Then the son from his ambush stretched forth his left hand and in his right took the great long hook with jagged teeth, and swiftly lopped off his own father's member.
>
> —Hesiod, *Theogony*

The story of Attis is variously told, and Agdistis and Cybele are often interchangeable. But whether the mother was still a hermaphrodite or a goddess, the birth of Attis was a miraculous one from a virgin. The intervention of the tree, either almond or pomegranate, that sprouted from the separation of Agdistis into goddess and lover is essential, since Attis was consubstantial with the tree that sprouted from the severed member. A water nymph named Nana took the fruit of the tree, either eating it or placing it with sexual implications on her breast or in her lap, and thereby she conceived Attis as her child, which is to say, the castrated member personified into the male god. She delivered him on the day of Sol Invictus, which is December 25. His mother abandoned him, and he was raised by a he-goat, from which he took his name, a buck being *attagi* in Phrygian.[3] Cybele-Agdistis fell in love with him, and, to prevent his marriage to a daughter of Midas, she caused him to castrate himself in a fit of madness under a pine tree, where he bled to death then merged into the tree. Attis and Nana mean "father" and "mother," and Attis sometimes bears the epithet of Papas.[4]

The cult of the Great Goddess spread from Phrygia to Greece by the early fourth century BCE, and then to Egypt. The worship of Attis was introduced into Rome in 204 BCE at a critical moment in the war with Hannibal. On the advice of a Sibyline prophecy, the Phrygian mother goddess was brought from Pessinus to the city in the form of a *baetylus*, a small black stone. The cult was led by priestesses and a few eunuchs, the

Galli, named for Galacia, who ritually emasculated themselves in a fit of orgiastic frenzy.[5] The Romans had been unaware of this disconcerting aspect of the rites when they imported the rock, and they subsequently prohibited Roman citizens from joining anything but a non-castrated membership in the priestly brotherhood. Nevertheless, the first citizen was consecrated as a eunuch in the year 101 BCE. Restrictions were lifted under the Emperor Claudius, who had considerable antiquarian interest and knowledge about religions, even fancying himself a descendent of Attis. The worship of the Great Mother eventually became one of the main Roman religions, along with the mysteries of Mithras and Isis, although self-emasculation became optional, except for the Asiatic priests

As the cult developed under the Roman Empire, Attis was invested with celestial and solar attributes and he became a guarantor of immortality. His distinctive iconography depicts him as a castrated youth displaying his genitals and wearing the same Phrygian cap as Mithras and Perseus.

The Tree of Attis

In one version of the myth, the rival who had roused the jealousy of the goddess was a nymph resident in a tree, and to get rid of her, she destroyed the tree. Mourning her death, Attis committed suicide. The tree was apparently the same pine tree that he became after his self-emasculation.[6]

A similar myth involves Helen of Troy, and offers insight about the role of the pine tree in the rites of Attis.[7] Helen took refuge on Rhodes after the death of Menelaus and was hanged by the women of the island on the instructions of the jealous queen Polyxo. The tree was called the "Tree of Helen," and beneath it sprouted the plant called *helenium*, which was efficacious against serpent venom. A different version of the same theme places the events in Egypt,[8] where the jealous queen has Helen exiled to the Pharos Island, where she planted the "herb of Helen" that was similarly an antidote for serpent venom. Helen bore the epithet "of Dendrites," meaning "Resident in the Tree," and the "tears of Helen" were the droplets of resin exuded by the pine tree.[9] This resin, which was metaphoric of the tree's menstrual flux, was considered the origin of both the mushrooms and also the little anthropomorphized creatures called the "seeds-of-the-pine" (or

quite simply, the pinecone) found at the base of the host tree. The mushroom, the pinecone, and the little creatures are all closely related.[10]

Altar of Attis draped with fringed altar cloth. *The head of Attis is rising out of it (like the rock birth of Mithras), growing into his pine tree hung with sacred emblems. A syrinx, a gigantic Phrygian cap, and a bull are beside the altar. (Rerendered.)*

> Mushrooms are all derived from the gum that exudes from the pine tree.
>
> —Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 22.96

> In the pure holy mountains thou hast engendered little-ones, seeds-of-a-pine.
>
> —An Akkadian incantation addressed to the pine resin.[11]

In fact, Attis appears to have become one of these little phallic creatures at the base of his tree. By one account, Cybele-Agdistis saw him bleeding to

death from his self-mutilation. She repented and begged the gods to bring him back to life. Thus Attis's body remained uncorrupted, the hair on his head continued to grow, and his little finger, the *digitus sacrus*, stayed alive and moved continually.[12] In Arnobius's account of the initial castration of Agdistis, it is actually the single "sole of the foot" or *imum plantae* (with a pun upon "root of a plant") that was tied to the genitals to effect the emasculation,[13] making the event suggestive of anthropomorphized figures like the "Shade-foots" or Skiapodes.

Under Emperor Claudius, the worship of his sacred tree, with the god's dead effigy bound to its trunk, was incorporated into the established religion of Rome and celebrated as a festival on March 22, followed on the next day by the blowing of horns throughout the city. Then came a day of hysterical mourning. This day, March 24, was known as the *Dies Sanguinis* or "Day of Blood." The Asiatic castrati paraded through the streets, dressed in effeminate oriental garb with golden trinkets. The *Archigallus* or high priest drew blood from his arms as an offering, and the populace, stirred by the music of clashing cymbals, drums, droning horns, and screaming flutes, became so ecstatic that they gashed their bodies with potsherds or knifes to bespatter the altar and the sacred pine tree with their blood as they danced in rapt frenzy. Some went so far as to imitate the god's self-emasculation.

Pine Tree of Attis. *Pinecones and birds, and hung with sacred emblems: syrinxes (panpipes), vessel, and bells, and central rosette (fungal solar cap), with a bull and a ram beneath it, the animals intended as sacrificial victims for the god. (Rerendered.)*

On the third day, the vernal equinox, the god's resurrection was celebrated as the "Festival of Joy" or *Hilaria*, a time of universal carnival and masquerade. It all came to a close finally two days later with a solemn procession to the waters of the Almo stream, which flowed into the Tiber just below the walls of Rome, to wash the black stone fitted as the face for a silver image of the Goddess.

Attis the Bull Slayer

On the *Dies Sanguinis*, the slaughter of a bull also occurred, the so-called *taurobolium*. This appears to be an innovation of Emperor Hadrian as a substitute for the ritual of self-emasculation, since the first *taurobolia* appear to have been performed in 114 and 134 CE at Puteoli in honor of *Venus Caelestis* or the "Heavenly Venus." The rite could also be done with a ram, the *criobolium*.[14] It was intended as a rite to benefit the stability of the empire and its emperor.

Attis slaying the Bull. *The god with upheld shield presents a fungal homologue (left).* ***From Attis with upheld shield, equated to the pine tree.*** *Detail of mushroom, below.*

The high priest of the mother, with golden crown and fillets on his head, descended into a deep pit covered by a wooden grating, on which a bull was sacrificed, baptizing the priest below with its copious flood blood.[15] He then presented himself to the congregation as "reborn for eternity" (*renatus in aeternum*[16]). The testicles of the bull were cut off and buried beneath an altar, just as the gonads of the castrated Galli were ritually interred. The Vatican was built over the site in Rome and several altars and inscriptions have been found in excavations beneath Saint Peter's Basilica. Inscriptions indicate that similar rites were performed in Gaul and Germany.

> Then by the many paths of the thousand openings in the lattice the falling shower rains down a foul dew, which the priest buried within catches, putting his shameful head under all the drops, defiled both in his clothing and in all his body.
>
> —Prudentius, *Crown of the Martyrs*

In this rite, the slain bull represented the castration and death of Attis, the blood of whose sacrifice imbued the High Priest with eternal life. The consubstantial nature of Attis and the bull is depicted with Attis as a bull-slayer, like the Mithras of the tauroctony. In such portrayals, Attis is slaying himself, which is synonymous with his death by self-emasculation. Thus the bull-slayer with upraised shield presents an analogue of the botanical identity of the god and the slain animal as a mushroom.

The Secret Meal

These were the public celebrations, but there were also Mysteries, secret sacramental meals. There were secret passwords, as well as a ritual formula that Clement of Alexandria records:

> I have eaten from the tabor, drunk from the cymbal, carried the Chalice (*kernos*), and I have slipped into the bedroom.[17]

The mention of the *kernos* is reminiscent of the Eleusinian rite, and the bedroom entered by stealth hints at something orgiastic. Indeed the hidden rites had the reputation for frenzied ecstasy. Clement further describes this sacramental meal as a "poisonous potion," a "drink of gall" causing frenzied madness, drunk in the misconception that it would lead to life. It is impossible to understand Clement as describing anything other than a consciousness-altering sacrament in the Mystery of Attis, and his words imply early Christianity had something similar but superior. The sacred meal in the religion of Cybele is probably its most ancient ritual and separate from the later modifications that adapted the religion to Roman mores.

As with the prevalence of a mushroom cult in Europe before the arrival of the Indo-European migrants, similar cults, probably separate or later assimilated with the Soma tradition, were apparently spread throughout the Middle and Near East. In addition to the massive evidence compiled by John Allegro, the name of the mushroom goddess Ptryh testifies, as we have seen, to a Canaanite mushroom cult still practiced in this region.

> I know that there are many worshippers of tombs and pictures. I know that there are many who drink to great excess over the dead, and who, in the feasts, which they make for corpses, bury themselves over the buried, and give to their gluttony and drunkenness the name of religion.
>
> —Augustine, *On the Morals of the Manichaeans*, 75

Augustine makes clear that there were Mysteries in the Christian Church that went beyond a simplistic reading of the Scriptures, and that some, in the context of idolatry and catacomb feasting, improperly called their "gluttony and drunkenness" by the name of religion.

Hermaphroditic Nuts

Although the myths often refer to castration as the removal of both the penis and the testes, hence the eternally moving fingerling creature of the severed member of Attis, in actual practice it is only the male gonads that are excised from the shell of the scrotum. The almond, the seeded pomegranate, and the pinecone of Attis are "nuts," a common metaphor for the testes. In Latin, the word "nuts" (*nuces*) alone desig nates the almond tree. The nut is a seed, which is the common designation of the sperm from Greek *sperma* as a seed and semen, which is the Latin for "seed." This metaphor was ritualized as the showering of the bridal couple with nuts among the Romans and other seeds in numerous cultures. In Phrygian Cosmology, the almond was considered the father of everything; the penis, after all, is only the delivery system. It once was the fashion to call Attis a vegetation deity, but actually, like all such deities, we should recognize that he is a personified sacred plant, so that "eating his almonds," as Nana did, implies eroticized rapture, for these are not regular almonds, but "miraculous fruit" symbolic of the Mystery. Thus, upon his death, he became a pine tree, host for the visionary mushroom that morphologically mimics the androgynous male-female metamorphoses that are central to his myth.

Almonds of Divine Empowerment

The rod of Aaron was the sign that he was empowered to lead the Israelites, for it alone of the staffs for each of the twelve tribes blossomed when left in the Tabernacle in the presence of the Lord. It had budded and flowered, and when the leaves unfolded, the flowers turned into almonds.[18] A similar blossoming rod was the sign that the widower Joseph was chosen to take the pregnant Mary as his wife.[19] This rod of the almond tree was the subject of considerable biblical exegesis.[20] It was a branch from the Tree in Eden engraved with true name of God and entrusted to Adam when he was expelled from the Garden. It had a long history, and passed on to Moses[21] with the serpent still attached to it, turning into a serpent when Aaron threw it down before Pharaoh to display the Lord's power. Moses used it to call forth the plagues upon Egypt, to strike water from the rock, and to part the waters of the Red Sea (and perhaps also to sweeten the bitter waters of Marah). It was placed before the Ark of the Covenant and eventually became the Tree of Jesse flowering with the genealogy of Christ. The rod flowering as an almond tree was finally placed before the throne of God, restoring the tree that grew in Eden.

As a symbol of the medical arts, Aaron's rod is depicted as a walking staff entwined with a single serpent, as distinguished from the caduceus of Hermes, wrapped with the two. Its association with medicine, which is to say drugs, goes back to Greek antiquity, where it was known as the rod of Asclepius, who was said to have the blood of the Medusa in his veins. The common name of Aaron's rod was ascribed to various plants with a clublike or phallic fluorescence, such as goldenrod and mullein.

The biblical episode of Aaron's magical display before Pharaoh is depicted in one of the windows of Chartres Cathedral, offering one more example of the perpetuation of mushroom lore in Christian symbolism and secret rites.[22] Here the fruited flowers are neither almonds nor any other of the ordinary candidates. They appear to be multicolored mushrooms. The motif is repeated as a frame.

Thus the almond rod is enveloped in connotations of divine empowerment through a botanical sacrament. The almond rod and the nuts, however, are equally involved with the female genitalia, as also are fruits like the fig—which resembles both sex organs and was also identified as the botanical original of the tree in Eden—and the pomegranate. The fig,

pomegranate, and the pinecone, moreover, are all seed receptacles, hence female.

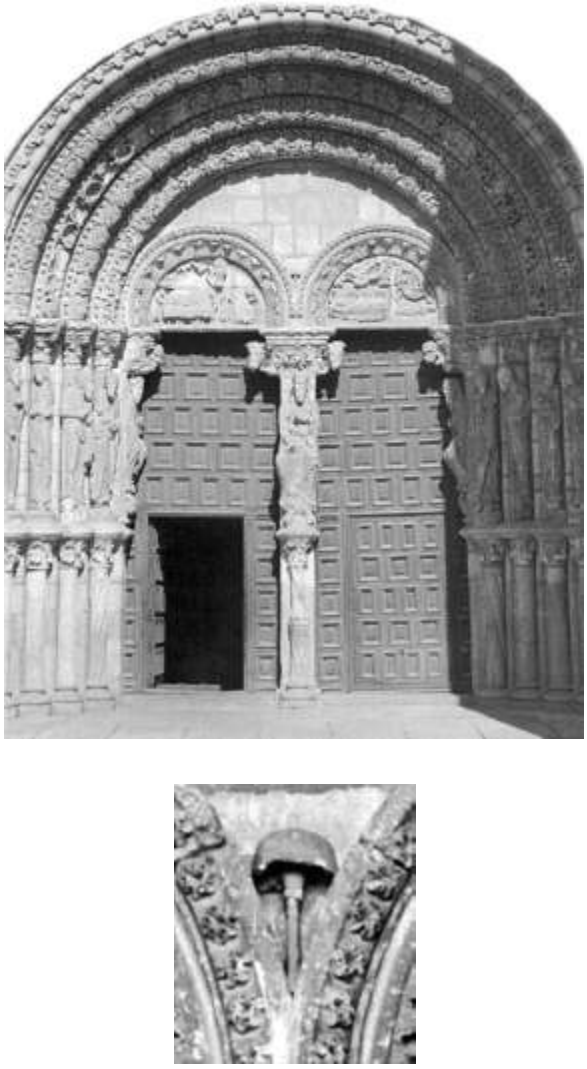
Almonds and the Gateway

The almond motif is commonly expressed in the *mandorla*, Italian for "almond," from the Late Latin *amandula*. This is the almond-shaped aureole that commonly surrounds Christ or the Virgin or other saintly figures in medieval art.[23]

When rotated from the vertical to the horizontal position, it becomes the *vesica piscis* or "fish bladder," a pointed oval figure typically formed by two intersecting arcs, such as the simple fish device that the early Christians employed as a secret sign to identify themselves to each other in their religion, supposedly as emblematic of Christ as a fisherman. The design could also suggest, however, the single disembodied "eye" that indicates initiation into visionary revelation.[24]

The antiquity of the almond *mandorla* goes back to the sacred vulva, symbol of the Earth. The goddess pulls apart the labia of her vulva to display this almond configuration as the entrance to paradise. It is also the shape of the spindle of the goddess as the controller of fate, the cloth woven of our destiny.[25] The vulva is the doorway into the Mystery chamber of the mountain-cave goddess, for the mystical encounter from which will follow resurrection. The old image of the Celtic goddess as Sheila-na-gig was often reworked into the Christian church that replaced her sanctuary, with her image placed at the apex of the almond-arched doorway beneath her spreading legs.

Hence the portrayal of Christ in his *mandorla*, both in paintings as the Pantocrator and in the portals of sanctuaries which depict him returning in glory from the celestial mountain through the cave-vulva, that is to say, leaving heaven to come into this world. The image is like a rending of the fabric of the heavens to produce the connection between the divine and the human, a tearing of the cloth of destiny, pulled apart by the two hands, just as the goddess with hers opens the sides of the doorway.



Romanesque portal with detail of tympanum mushroom centerpiece, San Vincente, Avila.

It is entirely appropriate that the portal to the Romanesque Christian sanctuaries perpetuated this image since the church is the equivalent of the mystical cave into which we enter through the terrestrial *mandorl*. We might recall that when Christ died, the veil of the Temple, a tapestry two stories high to cover the portal, was rent asunder from top to bottom. The ground was said to quake and the rocks were split asunder, and the tombs opened so that the saintly dead could return to experience the Resurrection.[26] This is precisely what the mandorla-almond-vulva of the portal with its rent cloth of destiny symbolizes.

The significance, however, is still more complex since the portal with its mullion or *parteluz* is seen as a mushroom, a device made explicit by the actual mushroom depicted as the celestial banquet on the tympanum of the Basilica of San Vicente.[27] Even without the mullein, the doorway with its spreading tympanum cap, or bisected half of the fish-bladder visionary eye, presents a clear mushroom configuration.

At the death of Christ, as the portals opened, he was given to drink from the sponge drenched in vinegar wine to quench his thirst, in fulfillment of the Scriptures.[28] The fungus, as we have seen, is so named as a "sponge," and the liquid content of this one is explicitly an intoxicant. In the brother Van Eycks's painting of the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, the sponge in fact is depicted with a distinctive fungal shape, and its intoxicating content is further equated with the psychoactive Datura lily blooming in the surrounding meadow.[29]

Mark specifically records that the wine was "drugged with perfumed unguents" (*smurnisménon*), that is to say, it was fortified with other consciousness-altering substances;[30] and John similarly records that the "sponge" was offered on a reed of hyssop, like the "sponge" of myrrh and unguents, a source of intoxicants. And the so-called "vinegar wine" is likewise a term for a strong intoxicant, like the Spanish *vino peleón*. Following the Crucifixion, Christ would burst free from the slumbering trance of his death, reborn like Mithras, out of the cave-vulva of his entombment.

There is a continuity of shamanic themes going back to the androgynous dwarf Iambe-Baubo of Greek mythology, who is represented squatting and pulling apart her vulva with both her hands into the shape of the almond at the portal to the Eleusinian sanctuary, exactly like the goddess, just as Demeter meets her for the Mystery in the episode of the potion of the *kykeon*, the sacramental food that is the key that opens the pathway between the worlds. The little malefemale Baubo is herself metaphoric of both the mushroom and of the goddess who spreads apart her receptive vulva. There are also male versions of the Christianized Baubo where we find a man with his legs opened and displaying his penis, like the knob-headed Egyptian Bes, a masculine symbol metaphorically convenient for the female almond-vulva-*mandorla* symbolism of the hermaphroditic mushroom.

Cybele presenting a mushroom "flower" to Attis. *Ca. 300 BCE, found in the Piraeus, Athens.*

Both the almond and the pomegranate bear fruit in autumn with the advent of the rains that induce the mushroom to fruit. Another plant is associated with Agdistis-Attis; this is the fairy-face "violet" that sprouts upon his tomb. The seed capsule of the violet-viola-pansy morphologically resembles the almond, except for size, being similarly ovoid with a velvety shell covered with short hairs. It blooms in spring, at the time of the Attis festival. It was added to certain ancient Greek wines to fortify them,[31] and even today, it is an additive to certain European alcoholic liqueurs, such as the French *parfait amour*. The almond-pomegranate contrasts the death of Attis in the fall with his resurrection with the violets of spring.

Dionysus *Mitrephoros*

Dionysus, the god of intoxication himself, also wore the Phrygian cap and bore the epithet of Mitrephoros, as did his masked revelers in celebration of him.[32]

Quite simply, to wear the *mitra* or Persian cap was synonymous with being in a frenzied state of ecstatic rapture. Thus Ariadne is wearing it, distraught at her abandonment by Theseus and about to be caught up in the Bacchic revel that will transport her to the stars as the *Corona Ariadnae*, "Ariadne's Crown," (also known as the Northern Crown) as the god and his wild troupe return triumphantly from the East.[33]

> Like a statue of a Maenad—Alas—she looks at him from afar in turmoil over torrents of cares, and she fails to hold fast the fine textured Phrygian band around her blonde hair. Her sheer cloak exposes a breast it no longer veils; and her smooth brassiere no longer keeps her milk white breasts in bondage.
>
> —Catullus, 64

An amusing grotesquerie of the ecstatic nature of the Phrygian cap is depicted on a Boeotian black-figure *skyphos* (the skull-cup used in the Kabeiric Mystery initiation[34]). It depicts what is probably the marriage of Hera and Zeus, only probably because the nature of the Kabeiric depictions is always dwarfish misshapen caricatures of the gods and heroes. A dancing bridesmaid, wearing the Phrygian cap, leads the marriage procession.[35]

The Phrygian cap—and whoever wears it—denotes ecstatic experience. The examination of Attis has extended the metaphoric complex to the almond, nuts, and ultimately reflects back upon the pinecone as the fruit of the host tree. It also expands the paradigm into Judeo-Christian symbolism, where the almond is both the gateway to another realm and is also explicitly identified as a mushroom.

Let us return now to the stages of the Mithraic initiation.

seven

Pater, Magister Sacrorum

Raven's Head

The dark sediment left at the bottom of the alchemical retort in the process of distillation was called "raven's head." It was the initial stage called *putrefactio*, the blackness or *nigredo* when the solid components of matter succumb to putrefaction so that they can be digested and transmuted represents the blackness of the primordial chaos before the emergence of the first point of light.

Similarly, the initial grade of initiation was the Raven or *Corax* (Greek *Korax*). The candidates in some sects probably wore Raven masks[1] and perhaps even flapped their wings like birds, imitating the cawing of the bird. Such mummery performed in the central aisle between the reclining benches would have accompanied each of the ascending grades of initiation. In becoming the Raven, the initiate was experiencing the trauma of the fiery incarnation into the wetness of human existence.

> Their eyes are blindfolded so they don't recoil from being foully degraded; some flap their wings like birds, imitating the call of the raven; others roar like lions; others again, their hands bound with chicken guts, are propelled over trenches filled with water; then comes someone with a sword and severs the guts—he is called the "liberator."[2]
>
> —Pseudo-Ambrosius

This incarnation was a spiritual death. Thus a ceremonial slaughter of the initiates was also enacted, a rite that the deranged Emperor Commodus, as we mentioned, is said to have profaned by an actual murder.[3] Julian was similarly accused of human sacrifice. Such accounts may be only an

attempt by the Christians to defame their rival religion, although the rite might at times have gone that far with one from the group of initiates.[4] As in the Christian rite of baptism, burial with Christ in his death, as Paul described it, was the preliminary to the resurrection to the new life.[5] Nevertheless, extreme intimidation, heightened by the incensed atmosphere of holiness in the confined subterranean chamber, was clearly involved in inducting new members into the Mithraic membership.

As would be expected, there were apparently various scenarios of intimidation employed. By one account, their hands were bound behind them with chicken guts; they were led blindfolded and naked, laid prostrate, intentionally terrified by what was said or done, and then touched with a burning torch and by the Father's sword, before their bonds were severed of this, accompanied, no doubt, by the jeering of the spectators. The symbolism of the rite can be compared to depictions of Psyche being burned with the torch of her lover Eros, signifying the torment and death of the Soul (Psyche) through its erotic corporeal entombment.

Another scenario is depicted on the Mainz cult vessel discovered in what was once a Mithraeum in ancient Mogontiacum, the capital of the Roman province of Germania Superior: the Father draws his bow, aimed at a naked initiate cringing to fend off the anticipated arrows. The initiator is seen declaiming the *legomena* or "things said" for the intimidation of the initiate. The arrow was apparently shot as a near miss, although an occasional mistake was always possible. The vessel is a large two-handled *krater* of the "snake-vessel" type with a serpent's head resting on top of one handle and its tail writhing horizontally across a quarter of the body.[6] This snake-vessel sometimes occurs depicted in the tauroctony bas-reliefs, with a serpent resting its head on the rim of the *krater*, suggesting that its contents are the sacramental potion of the "bull's blood." The serpent, in fact, was an element in the depictions of the tauroctony, where it is seen beneath the bull lapping up the blood. About eight other similar vessels were smashed in the destruction of the Mithraeum. The Mainz vessel was the only one capable of restoration.

The antagonism between the initiate and the initiator continued into alchemical lore. The highest Mithraic grade of Father had the planet Saturn as his patron. In alchemy, the initial Raven stage of *putrefactio* could be enacted as the Saturnine night, with the god Saturn ingesting his own

children. In mythical terms, they would eventually be regurgitated, elevated and improved as the nuclear Olympian family.[7] It should probably be noted that in ancient Persia, ravens were used for the excarnation of the exposed corpse.[8]

A similar scene is seen on the Dacian relief depicting Mithras shooting at a kneeling figure with his hands before his face, which is apparently a version of the Water Miracle. This suggests that this preliminary lowest grade of initiation was a symbolic baptism,[9] as would be appropriate for this first stage in the hierarchy as a watery death, culminating eventually in a fiery consummation. This same theme occurs in the Christian tradition of the Baptist in the River Jordan. The Christian sacrament is enacted to wash away the sin of the initiates' conception by their parents.

In mythical traditions the raven was condemned to thirst forever for having dallied in his task of fetching water, claiming that he was prevented by a water serpent for which reason Apollo transported them all amongst the stars as *Corvus* or Crow, the waterjug or Crater, and the water-snake Hydra.[10] As an eternally thirsting creature, the raven is an appropriate symbol for the thirsting of the fiery soul's descent into the baptismal basins. The archery of the initiating Father's water miracle begins the process of the Raven's redemption, but it also indicates that the poor bird's thirsting is the sinful cause of spiritual death and deserving of the Father's punishment. It has been suggested that an actual baptism with the blood of a slaughtered bull was involved at some point in the Mithraic initiation, although the Mithraea offer no suitable facilities.[11]

Such rites of humiliation and hazing were and are common for the induction into male societies, particularly into warrior brotherhoods. These rites are kept strictly secret and fiercely denied. Other ordeals included a mock interment, from the evidence of an apparent "ordeal pit" found in the Carrawburgh Mithraeum,[12] a bizarre apparatus found in the Riegel Mithraeum consisting of a blade whose two halves are joined by a hoop that would fit around the waist. It apparently threatened to sever the body in two.[13]

The Cupbearer

The insignia of this grade, as shown in the Ostia mosaic, was the raven, the cup, and the caduceus. The Ravens would thereafter serve as cupbearers (Greek *hyperetountes*, "waiters"[14]) at the sacred meal. The lower grades qualified only as servants for the elders. Thus, in fact, the initiator on the Mainz vessel holds the cup in his hand.

The caduceus was the magical staff of Hermes-Mercury, consisting of twin serpents copulating around the rod, a sign of hermaphroditic union. Viewing the two serpents copulating in this configuration was reputed to cause a change of sex. In alchemical lore, the raven came into being by the hermaphroditical union of the Moon and the Sun. Appropriate to the symbolism of the Raven's intoxicated slumber upon incarnation, the caduceus was supposed to bring on sleep.[15] The same configuration was worn as the belt of the Gorgon Medusa.

The Gorgon head, as we have seen, is a metaphor for the Soma sacrament. Thus all of Phrygia was blighted by the flight of Perseus, who was diverted away from Europe, with the severed head of the Gorgon: the barren fields drank in a poison from the dreadful dews of the dripping Medusa head.[16]

It is responsible, as well, for the generation of all sorts of toxic creatures. This toxicity of Perseus's land of the Persians is probably related to their herbalist traditions and in particular their sacrament. Hence Strabo records that the northern mountaineers of Media squeeze out what he calls a "wine" from certain roots.[17] We need only recall that Soma itself was named metaphorically as the "squeezed" one. The caduceus was the badge of the messenger, affording safe passage across the metaphysical frontiers that lay ahead, and emblematic as well of the medicinal drugs that mediated this same passage. The cup of the Raven contains the potion that mediates the watery death and the solar transfiguration, the fiery mushroom engendered as a solar disk by the fall of the lightning bolt, immersed in the watery liquid for its preparation as a potion.

***Raven** (Corax **or** Corvus) **emblem.** Detail of mosaic, Ostia Mithraeum.*

Thus the Raven was the one who came as the messenger to entrust Mithras with his mission of the tauroctony.[18] The "darkness" or mystery of this chthonic bird extends backwards in the Old Testament to the Flood narrative, where it is the first bird released. True to the "wildness" of its nature, it didn't return to the ark. Thus it was the only animal excluded from the biblical post-Flood scenario—its absence perhaps indicating the existence of esoteric lore that would surface later in the manna traditions associated with Elijah and Saint Paul.

The Raven represents the divine Word (*Logos*) that, as in the Gospel of John, was at the beginning to initiate the process of Genesis, his blackness an indication of its primal invisibility, preceding the light of the solar rays into the murkiness of the World Cave. In Christian traditions, he changed his color and became the dove of the Incarnation, and the one who announced the regeneration of Jesus as the Son of God as He emerged from His baptism in the River Jordan.[19] The Raven is probably a variation upon the eagle that brought Soma to the Earth, for both birds are cited as the bearers of *xvarr* or Holy Spirit (*pneuma*), or actually they complement each other: the Raven brought the fiery life-spirit (*hvareno = animus, pneuma, psyche*, soul-wind),[20] whereas the eagle brought the *haoma* as the material watery substance from the cloud-rocks, the inspiring (and thirsting) solar heat and the intoxicating liquid for its incarnation.[21]

Bread of the Sacrifice

In Christian traditions, the two aspects are represented in the Pentecostal Fire that burnt upon the heads of the inspired and empowered Apostles and the suspicion that they were merely drunk on wine.[22] But since the Raven is

the one who is ceremonially slaughtered in the initiation, he is another version of the Bull, both metaphors for the entheogen. Raven's bread is a name for the fungal sacrament, still known to the older inhabitants of the Shetul valley of Afghanistan[23] and in Siberia;[24] so, too, in Egypt fly agaric is called Raven's bread.[25] Ravens, like the reindeer, are notorious for their love of ingesting the mushrooms.[26] In Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece, the miraculous nourishment is seen being delivered by a raven to the hermit Paul and Saint Anthony in the desert paradise, where a reindeer is about to graze on *Amanitas*, depicted in a context of other plants useful for the treatment of the dermatological affliction of Saint Anthony's fire or ergotism.[27] Similarly, the inspired (or prophetic) Elijah of the Old Testament was sustained by ravens in the desert.[28]

> You shall drink from the stream, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.
>
> —1 Kings, 17, 4

Ultimately Mithras and the Bull are the same persona. Mithras offers himself up as sacrifice, just as Christ is similarly the sacrificed Lamb of God, assimilating the role of the lamb sacrificed in the Temple on Passover to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt. Inscriptions in Mithraea that identify Hermes-Mercury as Mithras[29] mean that even the Raven was a version of the god, and it is probable that at each grade of the ascending initiations, the candidate acquired an additional persona of Mithras. The Raven is often shown in the tauroctony flying with its message from the Sun, pecking at the flesh of the slaughtered, or "holding" the edge of Mithras's sky mantle in its beak, pointing to the Phrygian cap, or perched on the ears of grain growing from the tail, which is the end of the spinal cord and like the wound on its flank, another source of the vital fluids. Hence the grain sometimes grows also from the wound itself.[30] These depictions identify all these items as bread. The bull hunt of Mithras is similar to the mushroom-planting expedition of Wotan, in which ravens also play a major role.[31]

The Bride

The second grade elevated the initiate to the Bridegroom or *Nymphus*. For this, as an element of ritual transvestitism and initiatory humiliation, he wore a bridal veil (which hid away his face, hence another name for this grade was *Kryphios-Cryfios*, the Hidden[32]) or even dressed in female attire, and he was joined in a mystical marriage to the Father under the patronage of the planet Venus-Aphrodite, the goddess of love, who happens, not coincidentally, to rule the sign of Taurusthe Bull. It was she who impersonated cross-dressing. Thus the *Nymphus* is depicted as a woman in the persona of Venus in a fresco in the Parenti Dipinte Mithraeum near the Terme Maritime in Ostia.[33] This is a being in the process of metamorphosis; hence metaphorically it was used for a little person or "doll," the pupa, and applied as well to that stage in the development of the insect within the chrysalis, like a bee in waiting, preparatory for the role of honey in the higher grades of the Lion and the Persian.[34]

The cross-dressing may have entered the tradition through the worship of the Babylonian Baal and his female counterpart, the "mistress" Beltis, which is merely the feminine version of Baal's name. This would have a close relationship to the next Mithraic grade of Soldier, in accordance with both the astrological mythology and the actual gender-exchanging rites of the Baal cult, where women, in addition to dressing as men, took up arms. We might compare in Christian tradition the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, in which the Sacrificial Lamb is supposedly married to His Church,[35] a marriage ritually repeated in the sacrament of Ordination of the Catholic male priesthood.

It may be significant that Herodotus, probably in a garbled version, records that the term that Persians used for Aphrodite was *Mitra*.[36] Thus, the initiate under the patronage of Venus again achieves another identification with the persona of god. The emblem for this grade was the crescent diadem of the goddess, the bridal torch to light his way to the nuptial chamber, and an oil lamp. This last indicated his ascension to the new grade, for when the veil was removed, which is the nuptial gesture, he became revealed as the new light (*neos phos*). The Christians ridiculed this rite, for only Christ, as they claimed, was the Bridegroom, the *Sponsus*, whereas the *Nymphus* had not achieved celestial light, but had been thrown, according to them, only into darkness and squalor.[37] But the Christian *agape*

or “love-fest” Baptism-Eucharist ritual seems to have sometimes involved just such, fiercely denied, homoeroticism.[38]

> Among those following was a young man with nothing on but a linen cloth. They tried to seize him; but he slipped out of the linen cloth and ran away naked.
>
> —Mark, 14.51–52

> Naked man with naked man.
>
> —Secret Gospel of Mark[39]

Thus the Christians interpreted the male bride’s elevation as debauchery, for since he is *Nymphus* to the Father and a male deity, it is difficult to avoid the assumption that some kind of ceremonial sodomy was enacted, especially since the symbolism of such an act in antiquity was as the intensification of virility by the transfer of semen.[40] Nevertheless, two scholars claim that the male bride is an impossibility, and a third waxes eloquent about the enforced sexual abstinence of the military life,[41] disregarding the fact that its *impedimenta*, the support staff that included a horde of prostitutes, always accompanied the army, and homoeroticism of warriors is documented in the epic tradition about Achilles and his cousin Patroklos. Moreover, sexual hazing and humiliation, with no implications of femininity, are characteristic of induction into male societies. The monuments, in fact, document that the candidate was naked for various grades of the initiation; this appears to have been a preliminary even for those who led to investiture. It was said that the *Nymphus* ritually “pours out the cup of his heart” upon a statue of Mithras.[42]

The *Nymphus* grade is symbolic in an ascending series of rejection of the feminine materialistic role in procreativity; hence their exclusion from a cult that aspired to *spiritual* rebirth. Thus the highest grade of spiritual Father appears to have required sexual abstinence—at least heterosexual abstinence—as we saw in the sepulchral inscription by the wife of Kamenius, who laments, along with her children, the death of her husband from her chaste marital bed. This principle recalls the classic Persian dualism that characterized both Zoroastrianism and Gnostic thought, in which the material world was considered to be the domain of corrupted,

fallen existence. Women, of course, had their own exclusive Mysteries. In Greece, such was the Thesmophoria, and in Rome, the *Bona Dea*.

It is also characteristic that the initiation rituals involve an act that in other contexts might seem humiliating or embarrassing, thus reinforcing the injunction of secrecy about the cult's activities. In the context of the supposed characteristic Roman dread of effeminacy, we would counter that the Mithraists were significantly more sophisticated than is commonly assumed. The symbolism and philosophical speculation are certainly quite intricate, leading to countless revelations of the inherent divine design of the mythological system. Such speculations must have occurred, especially to the better-educated of the Mithraists, in particular through the influence of the visionary Eucharist.

The crescent emblem is another expression of the "cup of the heart" and is typical of the feminine, passive, wet, cold nature of the womb (in which regard we should recall that Taurus is an earth sign and is ruled by Venus, the *Nymphus's* corresponding planet). Thus the entire grade may be considered a way of honoring and propitiating the goddess. In this way, she is present yet hidden, as represented by Mithras's former consort Anahita, with alabastron and veiled head, emblematic of her secrets and subtleties. As men, assuming this role of *Nymphus* brought the active solar element into the womb, bringing new light where it had not previously been, hence the emblem of the torch or oil lamp. This sexual act, as sacred marriage, is represented as the conjunction of the diadem and crescent, as the Sun filling the Moon—Venus as the bringer of dew.

Nymphus (Bride) emblem. *Detail of mosaic, Ostia Mithraeum. (Redrawn.)*

The Soldier

The third grade was the Soldier or *Miles*, but as with the Catholic sacrament of Confirmation,[43] he became a warrior enlisted for a battle not of this world, but a conscript into the militia of Mithras, who, as *Deus Invictus*, always secured victory on the cosmic battlefield. The initiate expressly renounced a temporal Crown with the words "Mithras is my Crown; my Crown rests with my god."[44] He was offered a crown-wreath on the point of a sword, which he placed on his head and then pushed off.

Similarly, Christ claimed that His Kingdom was not of this world.[45] The Mainz vessel depicts the *Miles* wearing a breastplate or leather cuirass as he leads the solar procession for the conflagration at the end of time and the world's renewal. In the Santa Prisca fresco, he is dressed in a white tunic with a soldier's kit bag slung over his left shoulder, with arrows dangling from his belt.[46] It appears that Mithraism was a martial cult even in Persepolis at the time of Darius, and there is no doubt as to the significance of Mithras as attested by the popularity of his namesake.[47] The Ostia mosaic presents his emblems as this bag, together with a lance and a helmet, and he is placed under the patronage of the god-planet Mars.

> I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and confirm thee with the chrism of salvation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: be a perfect soldier of Christ.
>
> —Catholic sacrament of Confirmation

In Catholic Confirmation, the initiate's face is slapped as a symbol of endurance to pain; for the Mithraic *Miles*, he was allegedly branded on the forehead,[48] probably by Leo, his immediate superior in the hierarch, to represent the *xarenah* flame that springs from the forehead of Mithras. This branding is imitated in the Catholic rite as the "seal" (*signaculum, sigillum sphragis*) left on the forehead by the bishop's chrism. It also is represented by the cross or X rubbed on the forehead on Ash Wednesday, inaugurating the Lenten period that culminates with the Crucifixion; in fact, the Catholic practice of oneself may well be a response to the Mithraic branding.[49] Emperor Hostilian, the younger son of Trajan, was apparently a Mithraic initiate; he is depicted on the Ludovisi sarcophagus proudly bearing the branded X on his forehead.[50] This brand on the forehead is one of the many possibilities for the enigma of the triple sixes (666) that is the mark of the

beast in John's apocalyptic Revelation.[51] In the Capua Mithraeum, the candidate is shown naked for the initiation, with the sword at his feet and the wreath being placed on his head.[52]

Pater. *Dura-Europos Mithraeum.*

The Father

The final seventh grade of initiation was called *Pater*, "Father." The agential suffix added to the *pat-* root that occurs also in Cautopates yields *pater* or "father" in Latin. He was titled as the *Magister Sacrorum* or the "Master of the Sacred." It is indicative of the assimilation of Mystery traditions in the Greco-Roman world that Mithras with the title of Father was also the highest priest of Isis, as recorded in Apuleius's account of the initiation of Lucius as his son as he is redeemed from his asinine metamorphosis.[53] The Christian patriarchs, of course, also assumed the title of Father (Greek *papas*, Latin *papa*), with the pope as the prime among them.[54]

The emblem of the Mithras-Father, *Pater*, the highest grade, was the *harpe* pruning hook, the symbol of his celestial patron Saturn (without the side barb, but too small to be a *scythe*), the Phrygian cap, the shaman's water rod, and a disembodied eye, indicating the "vision."[55] Although the

mosaic's "eye" in the Ostia Mithraeum has been identified as either a *patera* (a saucerlike libation plate) or a ring,[56] there can be no doubt that the "eye" was a Mithraic symbol, as is indicated by the statue of the lion-headed Time-god from the Castel Gandolfo Mithraeum, which shows the indisputable "eye" in the center of the god's chest.[57]

Father ***(Pater) emblem.*** *Detail of mosaic, Ostia Mithraeum.*

In the Dura-Europos fresco, the Father is seen as an elder embracing a youthful *Perses* elevated now to the next grade as his son *Heliodromos*, the Solar Charioteer one hand on his back, the other holding a *rhyton*, the drinking vessel in the shape of an animal's horn, an appropriate chalice for this taurine sacramental potion.[58] Another fresco shows two members of the *Pater* rank (for the highest was the father of the fathers) enthroned, in Persian garb, a book roll in one hand indicating that they were privy to the secrets, in the other the shaman's rod, black with a flat (perhaps fungal) top.[59] In the Ostia mosaic, above the *Pater* insignia appears the *krater* for mixing the sacramental potion, with sheaves of grain as emblematic of the transmutation of the slaughtered into the barley. The same *krater* appears also at the entrance before the series of emblems for the ascending grades. There, it is not the sheaves that indicate its contents, but the two Phrygian caps of the twins, Cautes-Cautopates or their doubles, the fungal Dioskouroi.[60]

The grades of initiation were: Raven (*Corax*), Bride-groom (*Nymphus*), Soldier (*Miles*), Lion (Leo), *Perses* or the Persian, Solar Charioteer (*Heliodromus*), and the Father (Pater). It begins and ends with the *krater* for the potion from the two flanking red Phrygian caps to the similarly balanced sheaves of grain. One would have to be naive not to recognize the

centrality of a visionary sacrament in this Roman version of the Persian *haoma* cult.

The ultimate meaning is the composite deity who presides over the banquet celebrated at the Apocalypse. The iconography of this god for the end of time and the revelation afforded by this mediating sacramental meal remain for us to examine.

eight

A God for the End of Time

> This whole most beautiful mass of the heavens suddenly will catch fire from its own flames.
>
> —Seneca

Conflagratio

From the pre-Socratic Heraklitos and Classical Zeno, Philolaus, Aristarchos, and Plato to neo-Pythagorism and Stoicism, common to ancient philosophical systems of the universe was the concept of the World Age or Great Year—the idea that time was cyclical and the universe was destined to collapse inward upon itself in a final conflagration (*ekpyrosis* in Greek, Latin *conflagratio*) when the celestial bodies will all have completed their movements and have returned to their initial positions, only to begin all over again anew (the *palingenesis*).

The concept of cyclical time goes back to Persian, Iranian, and Babylonian mythology. The length of the cycle was debatable, varying from the 6,480,000 years of Diogenes and 18,000 or 10,800 years of Heraklitos to the 2,484 of the astronomer Aristarchos. This is comparable to the Indian *Yuga* system, a present-day version of this concept of the Great Year. According to it, we are currently in the *Kali Yuga*, which is a time characterized by a minimum of good and an excess of evil.[1] The discovery of the precession of the equinoxes reinforced the concept and offered a more precise schedule.

Various apocalyptic Greco-Roman traditions were in fact assimilated into Mithraic iconography. It could be seen as the fiery fall of Phaëthon in his solar chariot,[2] or the transfer of power from Kronos-Saturn to Zeus-Jupiter,[3] or the battle of the Giants or Titans,[4] or the Time-god Aion,[5] or the

Orphic Phanes,[6] et cetera., all of which are referenced in the Mithraic Corpus. Ultimately this "End Time" of universal collapse and renewal was presided over by the Mystery figure of the Mithraic lion-headed god.

The Fall of Phaëthon

The myth of Phaëthon, however, the son of the Sun god Helios, is of particular relevance among Mithraism's assimilations to Classical mythology because the Stoics saw his fiery fall in his father's solar chariot as an allegory for the final *Conflagratio*.[7] Transported to the stars, Phaëthon became the constellation Auriga, the charioteer, which can be visualized as depicting the pointed Phrygian cap of the charioteer's head looking toward the constellation Perseus.

The fifth-century poet Nonnos identified Mithras explicitly with Phaëthon, calling him "the Assyrian Phaëthon in Persia."[8] In the Mithraic initiatory hierarchy, this solar charioteer is the sixth grade of the *Heliodromos*, whose name defines him as the solar *dromos* or astronomical orbit.[9] Like Phaëthon's union with his Father Helios, the union of the *Heliodromos* (Mithras) with the Father completed the initiatory cycle, ushering in the final transcendence.

It is significant that upon Phaëthon's death, his lover Cycnus was metamorphosed into a swan,[10] whose first and final song lamenting his beloved is an inspired description of the Paradise that lies beyond this life. The most famous description of the swan song and it significance occurs in Plato's *Phaedo* when Socrates feels inspired to describe the afterworld as his moment of execution approaches.[11]

The fiery *Conflagratio* of the End Time connotes ultimate entheogenic illumination. Thus the fall of Phaëthon's chariot actually distributes solar fire upon the Earth as magical amber stones found under trees, for it was said that his sisters, the "Sun-maidens" or Heliades, were metamorphosed into poplar trees as they grieved for his death, exuding the stones as their tears.[12] The suspicion that these amber stones that seem to occur *only* under trees are the mushroom sacrament is perhaps confirmed by the observation that fly agarics exude droplets of a viscous slime on their caps; hence the word for mushroom in Greek as *mykes*, cognate with mucous. Similarly, mushrooms were thought to be derived from the clammy, slimelike phlegm

or *pituita*, a viscous gummy exudation of trees. These resinous droplets, as we have seen, were metaphorically the "tears of Helen." So, too, might we again compare the tradition of Wotan's annual Solstice flight in which *Amanita muscaria* mushrooms spring from the blood and saliva of his eight-legged horse where it falls to Earth—eight legs for the four men who bear the pall.[13] Also the deer, so notoriously fond of *Amanita muscaria* mushrooms, are seen biting the World Tree, whose blood-sap falls to the ground at its base in Celtic-Germanic imagery.[14] The flaming, single chariot wheel, either drawn by the four horses of the quadriga or surrounded only by their heads, is a common image in the *Rig Veda* and *Avesta*[15] and is, of course, an obvious metaphor for the entheogenic fly agaric.[16]

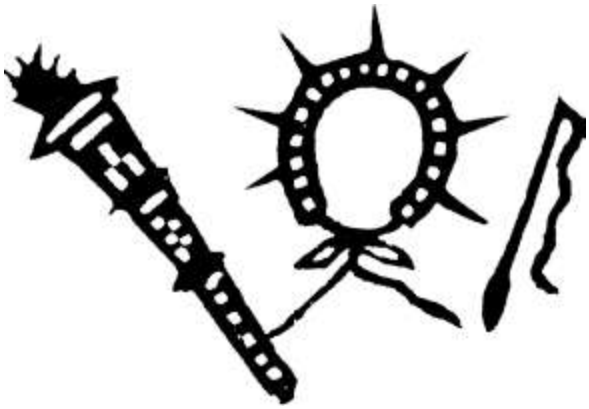
> The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures. And as I looked at the living creatures, I saw wheels on the ground. They were like wheels inside a wheel. The rims of the wheels were full of eyes all round. The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.
>
> —Ezekiel, 1.1–28

The *Heliodromos*

Emblems of the *Heliodromos* are his solar whip, a crown with seven rays for the grades of initiation or twelve for the signs of the Zodiac[17] (tied to his head by ribbons),[18] and a torch,[19] to set the world on fire, for he is clearly the agent for the event that will usher in the End Time for the final purest manifestation of the various ascending personae of Mithras, who has individually been personified in each of the lower grades of initiation. He sometimes holds in the crook of his left hand the blue globe of the celestial universe. In the Santa Prisca Mithraeum, he is dressed in a red tunic (like a cardinal's cape) with yellow belt and the sky mantle about his shoulders. In the nearby niche depicting the banquet with Mithras, he is shown similarly dressed as he shares the sacred meal with Mithras in the persona of the *Pater* or Sol.

In the Santa Prisca Mithraeum, the bearded Father greets the initiate, both identified by *dipinti*.[20] As the spiritual adoptive son of the Father, the *Heliodromos* is the final stage in the cult's exclusion of the female's role in

the death entailed through physical incarnation. The theme of homoerotic bonding and the spiritual son's superiority to the biological is well documented in Plato's *Symposium*. In Socrates's dialogue with the female shaman Diotima, the passion for physical parenthood is surpassed by the passion for spiritual parenthood. Socrates claimed that he had inherited from his midwife mother the ability to bring pregnancy to fruition; he helped the birthing of ideas.[21]



Charioteer (Heliodromos). *Detail of mosaic, Ostia Mithraeum.*

On the other side of the Mainz serpent-vessel, balancing the first initiation of the *Corax* via the intimidating archery of the Father's baptismal Water Miracle, is depicted the Cosmic battle, with the *Miles* or Soldier leading the *Heliodromos*, carrying his identifying solar whip, flanked by two rod-bearers—like lictors authenticating the power of a Roman official—the one in front with the rod pointed down (Cautes) and the one behind (Cautopates) with his rod-torch pointing upwards.[22] This is the same position they usually have flanking the Bull of the Tauroctony, suggesting that the *Heliodromos* is now the sacramental offering, as indeed he is in the Fall of Phaëthon.

> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
>
> —John, 3.16

The Banquet with *Sol*

The Banquet with *Sol* was the complement of the tauroctony, or actually its culmination, the second most frequently depicted mythic event, often presented on the reverse side of the cult altar relief that was fitted with a pivot to rotate so that it could be displayed when ritually appropriate instead of the former. *Sol* and Mithras, Father and sacrificial Son, *Pater* and *Heliodromos* are there depicted, often sitting on the hide of the slaughtered Bull.[23] The hide of a freshly slaughtered animal was emblematic of mediation with the other realm, like a kind of magic carpet,[24] a symbolism like the role of the slaughtered ram of the Golden Fleece that carried Phrixos off to the otherworld.[25] The symbol appears with the Father and Son in various scenarios. In some they are dining off a table draped with it,[26] or with the Bull's carcass in front of them,[27] or with the banquet table's traditional three legs comprised of the Bull's hocks and hooves.[28] The bull hide is a metaphor for the dried caps of *Amanita*,[29] just as the bull itself is metaphoric of the entheogenic fungus.

It was "bull" meat, although only metaphorically, that was eaten—little skewered bits of it that sometimes are actually offered to them by a Raven, identifying it as fungal by the metaphor of Raven's bread.[30] A crab or a scorpion often attacks the Bull's genitals during the tauroctony. This, too, is a metaphor for the mushroom. In the Afghan language Pash to, "testicle" is a vernacular name for fungus, and certain truffles are called *dombala'an*, "testicles of sheep used for roasting." According to an informant in Persepolis, that particular variety grows on the steppes after lightning. Other recorded names for fungi include "testicles of the little slave" and "devil's testicles." The resemblance to sunshades and the association with reptilian toxins are also preserved in the mushroom's name as a "snake parasol."[31]

Raven pecking at skewered bull's meat. *Marble altar relief, Poetovio Mithraeum.*

The entheogen also went by the name of *bread and water*,[32] a direct comparison with the Christian Eucharist of bread and wine. Since Justin Martyr knew the Christian Eucharist, it is interesting that he says *water* instead of *wine*, although the distinction is probably not significant because Christ turned water into wine at Canaan, and whether water or wine, the sacramental drink is transubstantiated into "blood." However, in both the Christian and Mithraic ritual, it was actually the god that was the food; Communion was achieved by physically and spiritually ingesting divine flesh and blood.

> He who will not eat of my body and drink my blood, so that he be made one with me and I with him, that same man shall not know salvation.
>
> —Zarathustra

> He who eats of my body and drinks of my blood shall have eternal life. My body is truly meat, and my blood truly drink. Whosoever eats of this bread shall live forever.
>
> —John, 6.54 *et seq*

The Persian account is explicit that the meal is a ritual of consubstantiality with deity. It doesn't matter if ordinary foods were also eaten in the Mithraea. The initiatory rite included sacred food, presumably "bull meat" and "bull blood," the latter, as we have seen, supposedly toxic. Depictions, graffiti, and Mithraic burial pits show grapes, wine, bread,

radishes, fruit, fish, skewered meat on a spit, cake, bulls, boars, sheep, rams, birds, and other animals. We reiterate, however, that a slaughtered bull would provide an excess of food for a small gathering of men in a confined subterranean chamber. Depictions of the Christian Last Supper also usually show a banquet of foods, although the sacramental items were only bread and wine. Early reports of the Christian Eucharist also record that the *agape* dinners were composed of ordinary food.[33] Obviously, the contrary is what was suspected. Moreover, Justin is citing not ordinary dining but the sacred initiation.[34]

In Persian lore, wine is the blood of the giants who wanted to scale heaven.[35] Scaling heaven obviously implies ecstatic transport and the Promethean threat to steal away the gods' powers. Such giants in Semitic tradition were the offspring of the archangel demigods who mated with the "daughters of men," teaching them the secrets of divine pharmacopoeia.[36]

For the Persians, the pomegranate seed "partakes of Paradise," and for this reason all seeds are to be eaten and none dropped to ensure that the devil not seize even the smallest bit with which to scale Paradise. The pomegran ate is clearly a surrogate for other, chemically active entheogens, corresponding in its unique shape to the opium poppy and by color (including that of its seeds and juice) to the *Amanita* mushroom, as well as wine, which often carried potent admixtures. The same sanctity of the pomegranate occurred in Greek with its connections to Persephone and Demeter, where it also is a surrogate for the fungal agents in the Eleusinian potion.[37]

We have seen that both Mithras and the Bull that he slaughtered have entheogenic attributes of the sacred mushroom, and that the Mithras of the Tauroctony is in effect harvesting and sacrificing himself.[38] "Let this cup pass me by," prayed Jesus on the Mount of Gethsemane to His Father, "except it be Thy will."[39] This is the cup of his coming crucifixion. The Eucharistic supper of sacrificed divine flesh and blood, however, is the precedent for another banquet at the End of Time: "Verily I do say unto you. There is no way that I drink of this fruit of the vine again until I drink it again with you anew in the kingdom of God."[40]

This is the pact that Mithras entered into with *Sol*, like that of Christ and Yahweh. The *Heliodromos* sacrificed himself, not by crucifixion (although, by at least one account, Mithras was said to have been crucified) but its

equivalent, by way of the *Conflagratio*, to ascend into the heavens with his father, for the second coming, at the end of time for the world's renewal. This was the tragic and triumphant destiny of Mithras, the great mediator between the forces of darkness and light.

The Sword of the Accord

Mithraic reliefs often depict the banqueting scene with the other grades of the initiatory hierarchy (Raven, Bride, Lion, Soldier, Persian) participating, for the banquet in the cult sanctuary reenacts with the human *Heliodromos* and his adoptive Father a mythic event that occurs simultaneously on the metaphysical level between *Sol* and Mithras, so that the Mithraeum and the Cosmos become parallel realities.

The banquet solemnized the covenant entered into by the two deities, the pact of the Redemptive Sacrifice, which began as an intimidating contest between the Raven and the initiating Master of the Sacred. The name of Mithras-Mithra (or Mehr in its modern form) has three meanings in Farsi: love, sun, and friend.[41] As an indication of how widespread this concept of the solar chariot and the planetary journey was, we might note that in the original Temple of Solomon, there were at the entrance horses and chariots dedicated to the sun, intended for the final funeral ascent past the planetary gates to the sun.[42]

Mithraic art shows this accord in various ways. *Sol* is usually nude or clothed only with a sky cape, crown, and solar whip that identifies him as the role played by the *Heliodromos* initiate, while Mithras, like the *Pater*, is clothed and recognizable by his Persian cap. Sometimes they appear as equals, for they are essentially interchangeable; the *Heliodromos* will be sacrificed in the fall of Phaëthon, but will ascend into the heavens as Mithras, escorted in the former's solar chariot. Or if there is a superior, it is Mithras-Pater, with *Sol-Heliodromos* kneeling naked before him in obeisance, being initiated or invested by the other with his task. The god-made-man at the incarnation is actually the truer god, for reason of his role as mediator and savior. So, too, does Christ virtually supplant Yahweh as God. Thus Mithras is both victim and sacrificer—harvester of himself.

In the Persian *Avesta*, Mithras is called the victori ous *Saushyant* (a word that means Messiah, Hellenized in Mithraism as the Mystery name

Sebesios) who "when the dead rise again, when the living have become immortal, will make life glorious,"[43] for Mithras, like Christ-Yahweh, took upon himself this heroic task of separation, to descend incarnate into darkness in order to open the heavenly gates to humanity.

Sometimes the pact is solemnized by the letting and commingling of blood, again a common ritual in warrior brotherhoods, so that *Sol* and Mithras become One, ratified as they always were, and this may have been how the consanguinity of the Father and his *Heliodromos* was sometimes solemnized at the banquet in the Mithraea. Thus in the Nersae Mithraeum, Mithras is standing and *Sol* naked, each kneeling on either side of an altar, both holding a knife; *Sol* lays his left hand on the outstretched left hand of Mithras to draw the blood.[44] In Rome, a naked Mithras and a clothed bearded person are on either side of an altar, above which the bearded figure, who must be the *Pater*, holds the right hand, while Mithras holds the other's wrist with a knife above it.[45]

Although the pact is often shown merely as a sharing of the "bull" meat and the clasping of right hands (*iunctio dextrarum*), other depictions suggest a latent antagonism underlying the accord with Mithras about to hit *Sol* with a stone,[46] a club, or a bull's shank.[47] The shank bone was customarily considered the god's portion and was ritually burnt on the altar. The shank piece, as represented in the Mithraic art, is noticeably flaccid, apparently because the bone has been removed for the god. The flaccid boneless shank also most resembles the shape of the fungal entheogen it represents.

This ritualized aggression at the Mithraic banquet is probably an accolade or investiture, like the tap with a sword conferring knighthood, for it is Mithras who empowers *Sol* himself for the renewal following upon the *Conflagratio*. Thus in the Heddernheim relief, Mithras appears to be conferring the nimbus of solar radiance upon the head of Sol.[48]

The so-called Mithras Liturgy in the Greek magical papyri identifies the Bull's shank as the constellation of the Little Bear, Ursa Minor (our Little Dipper), which contains the polar star. Together with Ursa Major, or the Big Dipper, it revolves around the pivot of the universe.[49] This pivot is the gateway to the celestial rim of the Empyrean beyond. This explains the occurrence of the shank metaphor for the visionary sacrament of the bull feast. In Egyptian astronomy, the Great Bear was called the Bull's Shank. In

the words of the Liturgy, the seven lesser young male gods[50] who are responsible for keeping the vault of heaven revolving on its axis greet another god, immensely their superior, of radiant appearance, youthful, golden-haired, holding in his right hand the golden shoulder of a young bull, which is named as the Bear that is the pivot of the universe. This is the cosmic supremacy that Mithras achieves through the investiture of the *Heliodromos* for the end game of the *Conflagratio*. At the End of Time, we are told in the *Avesta*, when the new reign of the Sun god begins, Mithras will slay a magnificent Bull and make a Potion of Immortality from its fat, mixed with the juice of the *haoma* plant.[51]

As seen in the banquet depicted in the Heddernheim cult relief, emblematic of this accord is the upright sword of the *Miles* from the top of which hangs the (red) Phrygian cap of Mithras-*Pater* crowned with the diadem of the seven rays of the *Heliodromos*-*Sol*. The remarkable longevity of this militaristic emblem is seen in the occurrence of this same red Phrygian cap atop the vertical sword in the seal of the United States Army. The resemblance of the Sword of the Accord to the configuration of a mushroom is intentional and would have constituted an element in the indoctrination of new members of the religion.

Banquet of Mithras and Sol. Cult relief, with sword cap-crown forming mushroom homologue, *Heddernheim Mithraeum.*

It stands between the two banqueters, with the carcass of the Bull in front of them. Sol, with his solar whip, holds a bunch of grapes, emblematic surrogate for the ritual entheogen, across the axis of the sword's blade,

while Mithras holds the *rhyton* or bull-drinking horn. On either side of the slaughtered Bull stands a Persian youth, presenting a basket with spherical "fruit-breads." The grapes and the drinking horn suggest that the emblem of the accord is the entheogenic drink-fruit-breads, and its design as a radiant golden red cap upon a stipe suggests that the baskets of round foods also represent the entheogenic sacrament.[52]

The emblem of the accord also occurs (without the Phrygian cap) on the similar cult relief from Rückingen, this time at the side of Mithras, who is reaching for one of the "breads" in the basket of the Persian servant. The entheogenic nature of the repast is indicated by *Sol*, who lifts the *rhyton* high as a toast with his right hand, while with his left he touches the Mystery sheaves of grain growing from the tail of the bull, with the three-legged Eucharistic banqueting table in front of it. The sword is here capped by a curious outline radiating like Sol's crown yet wide and convex—again a very convincing image of a mushroom. Both reliefs depict the banquet in a grotto, subterranean, above which is a scene of Mithras mounted on horseback, hunting a variety of wild animals, symbolic of his role as the *Deus Invictus*, who triumphs over death, a "hunt" in the forest, not for the actual animals but for the animate entheogen.[53]

Banquet with Sol and Mithras, with close-up of the Sword of the Accord again symbolizing the entheogenic muhroom. *Cult relief, Ruckingen Mithraeum. V 1137b.*

In the relief from the Poetovio Mithraeum[54] the accord is simply the *iucntio dextrarum* or clasped hands above the fire on an altar between Mithras and Sol, and the tip of the sword in their hands shows the same fungal design with the skewered bits of meat, with the Raven perched upon it and pecking at the pieces of sacred food. These "bull" bits are the Eucharistic Raven's Bread, sometimes even served to the banqueters on a skewer held in the bird's beak.[55] Its secret identity and consciousness-altering power was obvious to those who knew the Mystery, as revealed in the decoration of the altar from the Poetovio Mithraeum. Its sides depict the (baptismal) Water Miracle, matched on the other side by the sword, quiver of arrows, and bow. That the collocation of items is not coincidental is proven by the frontal scene of this votive altar. Here the Raven, with a star above his head, is perched upon the bow of the Water Miracle, resting atop the Phrygian cap, which itself sits upon the hilt of the Sword of the Banquet Accord.

Raven, with radiant flower-bread-solar disk perched on the bow of the Water Miracle, upon the mushroom-shaped hilt of the Sword of the Accord (left). Bronze figurine of Raven perched on mushroom hilt of the Sword of the Accord. Poetovio (base not original) (center). Raven delivering the commission directly to the spotted cap of Mithras, appearing about to perch upon it. *The cap of Mithras originally was jeweled. Dura-Europos Tauroctony Mithraeum.*

The *chi* emblem of the Eucharistic bread could be replaced, as here, by the markings of the solar wheel, itself another common metaphor for the mushroom.[56] Also suggestive is the little bronze figurine of the Raven perched on the "mushroom" cap from the same Mithraeum.[57]

Equally indicative of the true identity of the Bull sacrament is the Raven's role in delivering the Commission for the Tauroctony. He usually is shown pointing directly toward the spotted red Phrygian cap of Mithras, often just about to perch upon it, or else actually landed upon the red sky mantle above the Eucharistic sheaves growing from the Bull's tail.

nine

The Bread of Heaven

As a sacred food, bread was symbolic of the Cosmos, hence it was made spherical and incised with the Greek *chi* (X) indicative of crossings of the celestial equator and the solar zodiacal elliptic. The Mithraic bread called *darun, draona* for this incised "crossed" design survived as the most sacred food in Parsi tradition. Versions of it as a psychoactive sacramental bread used during Passover were still being used in modern times, as recorded in approximately 1956 in Yemen: "Later it (wheat flour) is put between green plants in layers, covered and twice left for twenty-four hours. It swells, heats, and begins to ferment, becoming very white, and it is then milled. Fermentation by fruit-juice … is also allowed."[1]

The green plant used in the procedure for making this special bread, which takes a whole year, is *Peganum harmala* or Syrian Rue, often used as an analogue for *Banisteriopsis caapi* in the preparation of *ayahuasca*. Its use can be traced back to pre-Islamic Zoroastrianism, and it is still employed today by Iranians.

Although the banquet sacrament was called bread, it was inextricably involved in the metaphysical metaphors of entheogenic growths. In ancient and Katharevousa Greek, bread is called *artos*, meaning something "fitted together." The Pythagoreans had a taboo against breaking bread (which was meant to bring friends together) for "some believe that the universe (i.e., the whole) had its origin from it."[2] In Iranian Zoroastrianism, the universe came into being like a moist doughy mass rapidly fermenting and generating internal heat and gas, expanding upward with the sudden growth characteristic of the mushroom.[3] This was how the World Mountain or Cosmic Pillar grew upward and downward as the Axis Mundi.

The Indo-Iranian word for "swell up" combines basic ideas of hollowing out a space, seething, and forming an outer crust or skin,

containing internal heat. Yeast is recognizable as a fungal growth and fermentation generates noticeable heat. Leavened bread is spongy, and the spongy nature of the mushroom is so obvious that the word *fungus*, as we have seen, is derived from the word for sponge. Related are the ideas of bubbling up like a spring and hollowing out a cave. The same root in English yields "heap" and "heave," hence "heaven" as what was heaved upwards like a great cave roof.

Etymologically as what was fitted together, *artos* is identical with Persian *arta* (and Sanskrit *amrta*), the world order whose essence was the Fire of Heaven. In the mystical Orientalizing language of John's Gospel, Jesus cites Scripture concerning the magical food called manna, "He gave them bread (*artos*) from heaven to eat," claiming that it was not Moses who did this, but the Father. "For God's bread is the one that comes down from heaven and gives life to the universe…. I am the bread of life."[4]

The "bull" food of the tauroctony is linked with the sacramental bread of the banquet and the pinecone of the Stone Birth (of the Water Miracle) on a bronze bust of a bearded god from Volsinii. The eagle (replacing the Raven) perched on his shoulder identifies him as Jupiter (Sabazios-Dionysus). On his naked chest is displayed a sacramental bread incised with the solar wheel motif, just above the scene of the tauroctony depicted below it on his torso. He holds the pinecone of the Rock Birth in his right hand and in his other the serpent so often involved both in the said birth and in the ethnopharmacological traditions of the mushroom's toxicity. To the right of the slaughtered Bull is a ram's head with a *krater* beneath it to receive the entheogenic potion.

Bearded god with pinecone (Jupiter-Sabazios) with sacramental bread on his chest (top). Bearded god with pinecone. *Bronze busts from Volsinii Mithraeum.*

A similar figure from the same Mithraeum portrays the bearded god with Phrygian cap as Mithras, holding the pinecone, with the serpent coiled about his other arm, where he holds a staff terminating in a design of leafing foliage, indicative of the botanic nature of the sacrament.[5]

Mithras Sabazios

Mithraism assimilated the figure of Zeus-Sabazios. Sabazios was a Thracian-Phrygian god, considered a foreigner by the Greeks but identical with Dionysus, and hence inseparable from traditions of ecstastic states of ritual inebriation. Thus in Aristophanes's *Wasps*, the play begins with two slaves commiserating about their task of trying to keep their old master from leaving the house for jury duty. Their remedy to alleviate their boredom is to escape into the dream world of drugs.[6]

—I want to lessen my cares a little bit.
—Be careful. A sweet bit of sleep is pouring into my eyeballs too.
—Are you getting really out of it or feeling ecstatic?
—No, but a sleepiness from Sabazios is taking hold of me.
—Then you're bull-herding the same god as me. Just now some Persian nodding-off of sleepiness just waged a military expedition across my eyelids. And I just saw the most amazing dream.
—Me, too. Like nothing I've ever seen before.

Unfortunately, nothing in the text betrays what stage action accompanies these words, but the two must be drinking something.

The iconography of Sabazios depicted him mounted on horseback, and thus he could be syncretized with versions of Mithras on the hunt.[7] In a Roman marble relief in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, his horse is seen placing its hoof on the head of a bull, thus also equating him with the Mithras of the Tauroctony.

Private Mystery cults of Sabazios existed in Athens as early as the fifth century, but the religion rose to prominence in Imperial Roman times. He was further identified with Yahweh because of the similarity of his name to *Sabaoth* or *sabbaton*, resulting in the assimilation of certain aspects of his rituals into Jewish practices.[8] His devotees were called Saboi. They were named after their god, since *zios*, the second element of his name, is merely the word "god," *deus*, as in the name of Zeus. They were the equivalent of the Bacchae—the devotees of Bacchus—and even carried the *thyrsus* into the Temple in Jerusalem. An element in the Mystery initiation involved allowing a serpent to slither erotically upon the initiate's naked body, so that the "god in the bosom" was the secret password for the adepts.[9]

A Roman relief in the National Museum of Copenhagen depicts Sabazios in his customary Phrygian attire, with the Mithraic *Sol* and *Luna* on either side of his head. He holds the pinecone in one hand, a staff, growing as a sheaf of grain at its base and terminating in the design of leafing foliage, in the other. Beside the pinecone is the Phrygian cap.

To his right is the Raven with a fillet in its beak, perched atop a stump, up from which coils the serpent, so essential for his cult, a lizard, and a frog. A turtle nearby is between the god's legs. Beside the Raven is a caduceus, and the whole toadstool configuration of the stump, with Raven, caduceus, serpent, lizard, and frog, culminates in a multibranching vine fruiting with grape clusters that resemble pinecones and strange funnel-shaped flowers, probably identifiable as Datura lilies. Above the whole fruiting toadstool stump is the bust of Sol, with the Eucharistic cup engaged in his solar aura, with two floret solar wheels above the rays of his crown.

Balancing this configuration, on the left side, is the Bull, pouring its blood into vessels and a fiery drinking horn. This Bull configuration is another metaphoric complex expressing the same thing as the toadstool configuration. Thus in ascending order are the vessels, the Bull, the

pinecone and Phrygian cap, chiastic crossed rods or torches, and the thunderbolt of Zeus-Sabazios. Above that is *Luna*, which suggests that the correct order to read the symbolism is the reverse, descending from the Moon.

Sabazios, with close-up of toadstool configuration. *Roman relief, National Museum Copenhagen.*

On either side of the god's head are additional Phrygian caps, each surmounted by horns and a cross—the latter, like the chiastic rods, indicating the celestial axis inscribed as on the Eucharistic loaves. In the gable is the solar charioteer *Heliodromos*, with the equestrian Dioskouroi and their stars on either side.

A balance scale above the head of *Luna* hints at an herbalist apothecary, as does the fungal object, perhaps a pestle, beside, or possibly in the hand of *Luna*. This whole configuration is the counterpoint to the cup and solar florets of the head of *Sol* on the opposite side. There is an additional floret beneath the vessels filling with bull's blood at the bottom.

Most significant for the identity of the sacrament, however, are the flies. There is a fly, decidedly not a bee (as it is sometimes identified), but a fly, with all that that implies about the agaric mushroom, above the turtle between the god's legs, and yet another fly beside *Luna's* fungal "pestle." Inverted cups or mushroom caps are seen beside the raven's stump on the right, while another sprouts on the left from the barley staff.

The deciphering of such a complex of metaphors would have constituted the catechism for the initiates. The pharmacopoeia obviously involves the *Amanita* mushroom, with the Datura plant and the ergot fungus as probable consciousness-altering surrogates.

The *Pater's* Ring

The scene depicted on an engraved oval carneol gemstone from Carnutum was probably from a *Pater's* ring. The engraver would have been provided with precise directions by his patron and probably would have had to be a Mithracist himself to understand the commission. The ring was private for its owner's viewing and would have been too small to divulge the secret to the uninitiated.[10]

The gemstone depicts the tauroctony, flanked by the heads of *Sol* behind and *Luna* in front, and by the two attendants, Cautes and Cautopates, and with the scorpion and serpent below. The tail of the bull sprouts beneath *Sol*, probably with barley. In front of the Bull is an object described by Vermaseren as an altar, for lack of a better identification. It is so clearly fungal as to leave little room for doubt, once one has established the context. No altar is so impractical as to have a domed top such as this, nor such a tapered base, even marked with striations to indicate the annulus ring or the horizontal remnants of the universal veil that are often found along the entire length of the stipe. Nor do altars have a tabletop on a base; they are columnar plinths.

Engraved gemstone from Carnutum, depicting the tauroctony and detail of mushroom.

Altars do indeed occur elsewhere. On a haematite tauroctony, for example, two altars appear, but one altar has two mushrooms on it, and there is perhaps something similar on the other, while a serpent's head makes an unlikely right angle to stand vertically erect like a mushroom beneath the bull.[11] Something similar occurs on the gemstone with the branching head of the serpent.

The altars are, of course, meant for burning offerings symbolically. Hence what is on top of them (or on their pileus-cap) are pieces of "bull meat." The top of the altar on the right edge of the oval gemstone is not flat. Moreover, two pieces of skewered "bull meat" are shown implausibly attached to Mithras's sky mantel, identifying the entire configuration of the god with red cape and single leg kneeling upon the slaughtered Bull as a consubstantial version of the same fungal sacrament. The Bull, moreover, is always white when color is an option, as in the Barberini fresco,[12] whereas the serpent below is a speckled red. The bull is also white in the Dura-Europos frescoes. A white beast was considered particularly appropriate as a sacrificial offering.[13] Mithras, moreover, always pulls the white head of the bull to the ninety degree vertical, making him into the stipe, beneath his starry red cape and cap.

Priest of Mithras with Eucharistic cup at an altar.

A similar tauroctony displays the Raven identifying the flowing mantle as the raven's bread, as Mithras implausibly plunges the *harpe* pruning hook downward into the slaughtered Bull.[14] The kneeling god is again not only one-legged, but essentially riding the Bull as a vehicle for his interchangeability with the sacrament.

It is significant that Mithras does indeed sometimes take a "wild ride" on the Bull.[15] All the episodes are variations of the same theme, and, despite a linear chronological sequence, they are actually synchronous as equivalent mythological expressions of the same sacramental event. The Bull's blood, in fact, is clearly botanical, for from it, according to one account, sprouted not only the ears of grain (or more exactly fifty-five kinds of grain), but also twelve medicinal plants.[16] In Zoroastrian theology, Ahura Mazda created six additional luminous personifications of himself (three male and three female) to aid in the battle against Ahirman, the evil of darkness; the last of these is Amereretate, the female who represents the quality of immortality and whose earthly manifestation in the material realm is that of plants.[17] In Armenian myth, the blood the Crucified Christ revives Adam, a tradition thought to date from at least the second century, and this same blood makes grain grow.[18] Thus, the validating ride is a shamanic journey and should be compared, for example, to the ride that Perseus-Bellerphon took on the magical horse Pegasus that emerged from the severed neck of the Gorgon Medusa. Theseus, too, took a trip on the back of Skiron's turtle down into the underworld and back again.[19] The brigand Skiron was himself so named as the "parasol-man," a common metaphor for mushrooms.

Raven identifying the Phrygian cap and the sky mantle of the hero as Raven's Bread. *Marble relief, Mithraeum near the Church of S. Martino ai Monti, Rome.*

On the *Pater's* ring, Cautes and Cautopates are wearing what look like skirts. These are probably ritual belts, often seen also around Mithras or the Bull. These are traditionally red and indicate the belt around the Cosmic Egg that divided it into two hemispheres, as the agaric mushroom divides itself from the egg stage to that of the dumbbell shape as it emerges from the ground, the hemispheres becoming distinguishable as *Sol* and *Luna*.

The Cosmic egg split for the birth of Mithras.

Dramatis Personae

The tauroctony usually includes various other items. Sometimes the two psychic directions of descent (lunar Genesis) and ascent (solar Apogenesis), indicated by the twins Cautes and Cautopates and the busts of *Luna* and *Sol*, are made more explicit by plunging and ascending lunar and solar chariots, as well as the panoply of the planetary patrons and the signs of the Zodiac.

There are also the dog and the serpent, both eagerly lapping up the spilled blood-semen of the slaughtered Bull. It was not only the Raven who delivered the divine command, but also Saturn—both appropriate, as we have seen, for the initial stage in the alchemical transmutation. Thus Saturn was sometimes present at the birth of Mithras. So, too, was Neptune, in imitation of the Bull and with the sea nymph bride Amphitrite by his side, to suggest the synchronous event of the Water Miracle.[20] Other animals are sometimes included, such as the lion, lobster, snail, crocodile, dolphin, slug, et cetera. And sometimes the cup for the sacred drink is included.

There is no myth, no explicitly Mithraic sacred story of the tauroctony recorded as in religious texts, only the testimony of the many depictions of the event in Mithraic art. Apart from a few papyrus liturgies and occasional graffitti or *dipinti*, the entire religion must be deduced from artistic representations and archaeological remains. The actual killing of the bull appears to have been most popular amongst the Roman legionnaires stationed along the German frontier of the Empire, although even today Kurds and Mithraists sacrifice an actual bull during the Mithras festival of *Mehergan*. The tauroctony is a Hellenized heroic exploit, something eminently appealing to the life of a soldier who daily faced hardship and his own mortality.

Perhaps originally Mithras only stole the Bull, the *bouklopos* episode. Thus the fanatical fourth-century Christian apologist and astrologer Firmicus Maternus, speaking of the Persians and the Magi, derided Mithracists as the initiates of a cattle thief, whose rites they transmitted in secret caves.[21] This was a point that the Christian critics readily picked upon to ridicule the rival religion that had a thief for its god, although, of course, their own diety was accused of crimes, jailed, beaten, and put to death

alongside other criminals, an event of some embarrassment to the early Church.[22]

> They are initiates of the theft of the bull, united by the handshake of the illustrious father.
>
> —Firmicus Maternus

The cattle theft, however, despite the Christian apologists, is a venerable and common event in myths from remotest antiquity, and the stolen cattle are often concealed in caves or mountains. In Greek myth, Hermes stole the cattle of his brother Apollo, making them appear to have walked backwards, an apparently impossible act since cattle are named as the "forward walkers," *probata*. Herakles, too, captured the cattle of Geryon,[23] and Cacus stole away eight of them into his cave on the Palatine Hill in Rome, he, too, dragging them backwards by their tails. The unfavorable comparison of Mithras to Cacus is the subject of a poem by the Christian apologist Commodianus, written as an acrostic on the word *invictus*—invincible—one of the epithets of the god.[24]

> **I**f indeed a god, Invictus was rock-born;
> **N**ow which came first? Here rock has
> **V**anquished god: for who created it?
> **I**f a god, by theft he could not live; yet
> **C**attle-thief is the name he goes by.
> **T**erraneous he was born, a monster;
> **V**ulcan's son he's like, old Cacus who
> **S**tole another's beasts, hid them in a cave.
>
> —Commodianus

Odysseus's sailors killed the Cattle of the Sun. When the monster-slaying episode is added, it is usually in the cave that the beast is found, as was the case with the Medusa of Perseus. The same elements occur in the *Rig Vedic* myths of Indra the Vritra-slayer.[25]

The cattle-theft is actually a version of the rock-birth and the Water Miracle. The Greek *ouros* (Latin *urus*) was a wild bull, and the *bous ouros* was the "primeval bull" of life (Latin *bos primigenius*), corresponding to

the oriental Bull of Heaven. His life-giving water was *ouron* or urine and *oros*, semen, vital fluid. It was carried by the *ouros* or wind from the lofty sky or *ouranos*, which was a mountain or *oros (oure os*), that limits and guards (*ouron, ouros*) the world and from which the guardian (*ouros*) keeps watch.[26] These are only the Greek versions of this amazing collocation and play on similar words, but the same mythopoetic configuration of the Bull, its herder-thief, the cosmic mountain-cave, celestial water, and urine can be traced in all the Indo-European languages.

Serpent emerging from Phrygian cap beneath the Bull's snout at base of a cypress tree, with Mithras emerging from adjacent tree, and also carrying the Bull. *Detail from tauroctony relief, Heddernheim Mithraeum.*

The Bull of this life giving fluid or the herd of the cloud-cattle is stolen from the cave of the sunset so that it can reappear in the cave of the red dawn, producing the fall of fertilizing rains, struck from the cloud-rocks by the hero's arrow. The cave is at times seen to glow with honey and with its swarm of bees.[27] This Bull of Heaven is the source of *haoma*.[28] It is also the Cosmic Bull and the so-called Herb of Immortality of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamian traditions.[29]

Thus Mithras is also seen as the Bull-carrier or *bouphoros (taurophoros*), either lifting it up on his back or dragging it to his cave.[30] Both versions are sometimes represented on the same relief. At Hedderheim and elsewhere, the Bull is slung over the back of Mithras with a coiling serpent beneath its snout. The scene is depicted at the base of a cypress tree, next to which is another cypress, its foliage like a pinecone from which Mithras, with Phrygian cap, is emerging.[31] This is a particularly revealing image that puts the mushroom's red cap, with an associated serpent,

emerging on the ground beneath a host tree, with the Bull's head directing our eyes to the bizarre scene. A similar association of the carried Bull's snout at the base of a tree occurs in the tauroctony from Rome.[32]

Deus Aeternus

Opposites become complements as the higher Mysteries are revealed, bringing a subtler and much more adequate understanding of Gnostic dualism than the simple dichotomy of the good and light versus the evil and darkness so often cited. The final image of the Mithraic initiatory ascendancy is integration represented as the *Deus Aeternus*, the lion-headed god, sometimes identified as Arimanius or Ahriman, the evil opposite of Ahura Mazda. More probably, it is Zurvan, the nameless god of infinity, who was father of the former two. It is Mithras of the apocalypse standing at the end of time, after his ascension in the chariot of *Sol* who had ushered in the renewal of the world through his sacrificial *Conflagratio*.[33] It also commemorates the hypostasis of the god's first fiery persona as Leo. The John of Revelations described the same god in Christian terms, and we must remember that the end time was eagerly awaited by all the Gnostic sects as an event in the near future.

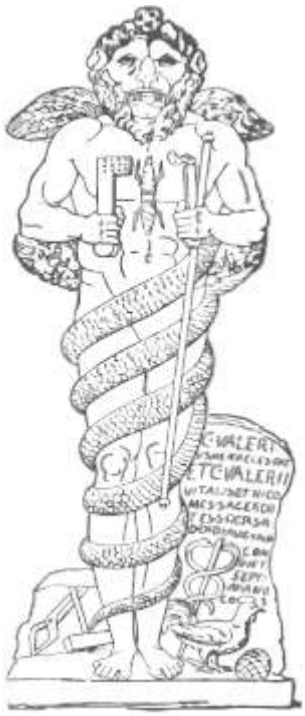
Sometimes the figure is clearly Mithras as the Time-god Aion, standing naked with youthful curly Apolline head, his body entwined by the serpent, whose five coils leave the god's male genitals and chest exposed, on which he displays a lion's head. A deer's head is attached to the tree stump against which his leg rests.[34]

More often, however, the symbolism is more syncretistic and complex. In the relief from Mutina, the figure is again clearly the Apolline Mithras, with lion's head displayed on his chest, but his feet are the goat hooves of Pan, and he stands on a flaming mushroom half-shell, with the other half inverted and a flame above his head, the two eggshell caps of the Dioskouroi. The heads of a ram and a deer are budding and protruding from his sides. Five rays of radiance stream from his head. The serpent, whose head appears above the fiery upper eggshell, coils about his body, and the god holds a thunderbolt in his right hand, a long staff in his left. He is winged, and behind his shoulders are the horns of a lunar crescent, either bovine or taurine. He is standing in a niche bordered by the signs of the

zodiac, apparently for the Age of Aries, with the ram just above his head, the bull of Taurus to its left and the two fish of Pisces clockwise to the right. In the four corners appear the heads of the winds. In this configuration, Mithras has assimilated the Orphic god of revelation known as Phanes.[35]

The figure, however, can be presented less Hellenized in more horrific and grotesque versions. The head is that of a lion, often with the mouth wide open, sometimes fitted to allow an actual fire to be lit from behind,[36] or showing a blazing flame emerging,[37] and lion heads may adorn Mithras's stomach and kneecaps or one of the heads of the three-headed infernal dog Cerberus at his feet (the others being those of a dog and the ram),[38] or the lion's head may hang like a trophy on his belt,[39] as if he were another Herakles for his conquest of the Bull. The god may have multiple disembodied eyes on his chest in place of the lion's head and on each cheek and another on the forehead of his leonine face,[40] or a thunderbolt may replace the eye or lion's head on his chest.[41] The serpent entwines his body, usually ascending its head on the god's head, chest, or shoulder, sometimes with the signs of the zodiac between its coils.[42] Once, however, the serpent is draped downward, with both its head and tail dangling into the krater-chalice at the god's feet,[43] or two serpents descend from the god's goatlike loins, one to a fiery altar at his feet, the other to the *krater* on the opposite side.[44] On another statue, this motif of the serpents and the *krater* is placed on the god's chest.[45]

The collocation of lion's head, thunderbolt, disembodied eye, serpent, and *krater* suggest the god's consubstantiality with the entheogenic mushroom. Normally his wings, emblematic of his ecstatic flight, are four, two upraised, the others directed downward, perhaps indicating the parallel morphology of the *Amanita muscaria's* mushroom-cap stages where its white, featherlike gill-wings are first curved down, gradually inverting and turning upward as if taking wing. The four wings can be attached at his shoulders, hips, or feet.[46]



Leontocephalic God. *Winged at the shoulders and hips, in opposite directions, marked with symbols of the four seasons, thunderbolt on his chest, with key (drill holes for gems) and long double-knobbed staff. At his feet, the tongs and hammer of Hephaistos-Vulcan, caduceus of Hermes-Mercury, cock (of Persephone?, Cautes?), and pinecone.*

Mithras may hold one or more keys that unlock the heavens against his chest[47] or head,[48] a double-knobbed staff,[49] the scepter of Zeus,[50] the torch of the *Heliodromos*,[51] or the fire shovel of Leo.[52] The thunderbolt may appear between the keys on his chest, which again suggests the entheogen, for often the entire figure is painted red or gilded.[53] The red-gold key that unlocks the heavens was sometimes set with white pearls, now lost. For the Christians, it was Saint Peter who held the key. The god may stand between pinecones[54] or on the Cosmic Globe, marked by the crossing of the two celestial orbits with dots to indicate the planets.[55]

Since the entheogenic mushroom of Perseus-Mithras can also be represented as the Gorgon, it is not surprising to find that it can replace the lion's head, thunderbolt, Key of Heaven, eye, serpent chalice on the chest of the lion-headed god's chest. In fact, the Gorgon head alone as an iconographic item only became more fully anthropomorphized after the

seventh century BCE,[56] and it has certain leonine features, including the gaping mouth opened to roar.[57] He carries a key and a fire shovel.[58] The lion-headed god, although obviously male, very rarely displays his genitals, indicating his hermaphroditic and self-replicating nature, like the Gorgon, who is obviously female but bearded and belted with the caduceus configuration of copulating serpents—the sight of which was reputed to occasion a change of sex. The Gorgon figured as well in other Mystery cults as the visionary sacrament.[59] Even Helios himself acquired syncretistic attributes of the Gorgon Medusa.[60] An Etruscan statue of Athena displays the Gorgoneion as the Sun on her breast.[61]

A fresco of the tauroctony from the Barberini Mithraeum depicts the lion-headed god standing on a globe in the center of the zodiac that arches above the Bull-slaying episode. His head extends into the region beyond, which is the Empyrean, indicated by an arching series of fire altars.[62] The figure conforms to similar depictions relating him to the zodiac, which is the sphere above the level of the planetary gates, and the key to the realm beyond it, which is symbolized by the serpent wrapped about his body. This is the great serpent who represents the cosmic boundary and symbolized the world soul. Often it is seen curling back upon itself in the configuration of the *uroboros*, the "tail-eater," although more probably it should be interpreted as the "urine-drinker," with occult reference to the metabolite of the botanical key in the deity's hand, that is to say, the fungal intoxicant metabolized in urine.

The Solar Wheel

The solar wheel and its mushroom identity can be traced back to the Mithraic religion's oldest Indo-Iranian origins, well before its later evolution into Hellenized Roman manifestations. The royal seal authenticating the authority of King Saussatar (ca. 1440–1410 BCE) of the Mitanni, an Indo-European (Hurrian) people who settled in northern Mesopotamia around the sixteenth century, depicts the tauroctony. In the central position is a figure perhaps of a goddess with lion's legs, in Phrygian cap, her arms spread wide displaying them as wings. Beneath her wings, she is flanked by two lions, upside down, descending, each with its back toward her, like the lions of the later tauroctonies descending into the

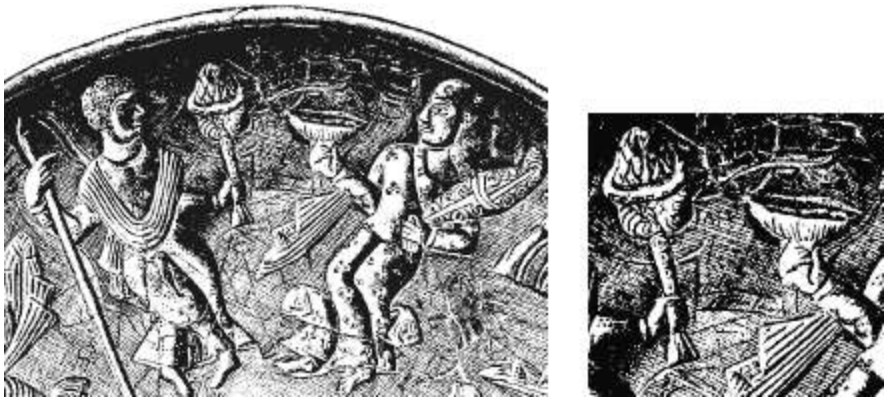
kraters of the Mystery. At her feet are two animals, perhaps a rabbit and a bird.

Above her, the motif of the spread wings is repeated, identifying her as the solar wheel, which replaces her Phrygian cap. It is cradled atop wings displaying the feathery spore-bearing gills of the mushroom's underside. Her tawny leonine body is replaced by the stipe of the mushroom's one-foot. This seven-spoked, solar-wheel bird-mushroom is flanked by rampant lions. Atop each lion perches a raven.

Cylinder seal of King Saussar, Mitanni.

On the left next to this configuration is the head of a chaos monster, probably Humbaba, who, like the Gorgon, was often depicted as only a head. The strange configuration is supposed to represent the coiled entrails of a man or beast. This is an emblem of his visionary power since such coils were used in divination.[63] He was, however, described as a roaring, fire-breathing lion, and whose look occasioned death. It was he who guarded the cedar forest in *Gilgamesh*. Cedars are host for the fly-agaric mushroom, and when he was decapitated, the gods lamented the loss of the source for their fiery drink.[64] Humbaba, no less than the Medusa, can be seen as a form of the mushroom's anthrophomorphism in myth.

To the right of the solar wheel stands a priestly, robed male figure in Phrygian cap, from whose hands, held upward in the salute of reverence, flows the stream of the Water Miracle downward to the descending upside-down lions. On the other side, a cross-legged male figure in Phrygian cap, the hero-god Mithra, belted like the Torchbearers, is in the act of slaughtering the Bull, kneeling on its back, just beneath Humbaba's head; its sacrificed *bucranium* or "bull's head" appears behind the hero's back.



Anahita presenting the solar disk to the king, who holds the flaming chalice. *Silver bowl, ca. 240–400 CE, Sassanid dynasty.*

To the left and right of the goddess are the twin heroes wearing radiant star-caps. They are caught in the act of conquering lions, one of them holding the rump of his lion high in the air, attempting to break its back with his knee, the other forcing it down to the ground striding atop its head, apparently having already succeeded in rupturing its spine. A large star beside the former twin identifies him as the Mitanni equivalent of Cautopates, presiding over the fiery liberation. The goddess represents wisdom incarnate—Gnosis.

Two of the murals from the Capua Mithraeum show the mystagogue treating the initiate in a similar manner to the lions on the Mitanni seal, in imitation of the Tauroctony of Mithras.[65] The name of this goddess would have been the equivalent of the Vedic Aramati, a compound of *ara* (a thing fitted together like bread or the spokes of a wheel) and *mati* (mind, intelligence). Her Greek equivalent is Themis, the order established in the Creation, the opposite of the chaos of Humbaba. She is the result of the hero-god's task. Another version of her symbolism is Athena, the transmutation of the Gorgon Medusa. In Latin as Minerva, she has the same Indo-European *mati* verbal basis.

Anahita, with opium and mushroom chalices.

For the Sassanids, who succeeded the Parthians in the Persian lands from the third to seventh centuries CE, this goddess was the Zoroastrian Anahita, the virgin mother of Mithra, and hence the equivalent of the rock from which he miraculously was birthed with the spring of life-giving waters. She is seen on a silver bowl presenting this solar disk as she confers empowerment to a king, who holds the baton of authority in his one hand and in the other a winged flaming chalice. The flaming chalice resembles a flower, with the calyx represented like a pair of wings, while the goddess's stemmed disk looks like the mushroom with fully expanded and inverted cap, displaying its gills on its underside.

In another scene, she holds a chalice resembling an opium poppy capsule, indicative of its consciousness-altering contents, while behind her appears another mushroom cup.[66] Such a bowl was almost certainly not ordinary tableware, but a ritual vessel. For four hundred years, the kings of the Sassanid dynasty had themselves depicted on their coinage crowned with the solar disk. They were zealous persecutors of the Christians since Rome, which was their chief political opponent, had been recently converted under Constantine. It was during the reign of the Sassanid King Shahpur that the Prophet Mani was crucified.

The Sassanid coinage customarily depicted the monarch crowned with the solar disk. A boat bowl dating from the sixth to seventh century in the

Baltimore Museum depicts the king, with dancing girls, a throne supported by birds and wearing the lunar crescent cradling the solar disk, flanked by birds. The theme of such empowerment goes back one thousand years. An Assyrian ivory plaque from the Palace at Nimrud, now in the Ashmolean Museum, shows the enthroned king grasping an exotic flower from the tree in front of him and holding a bouquet of plucked flowers in his other hand. Beneath his throne, an eagle and a raven flank a miniature version of the tree as a mushroom.[67] The same throne of Asiatic empowerment is depicted on a third-century BCE Greek *krater* from Southern Italy.[68] It depicts the arrival of Bellerophon, who is a doublet of Perseus, with the magical horse Pegasus who sprouted from the severed neck of the Gorgon Medusa, at the court of Iobates on his quest for the Chimera. The monarch, with Phrygian cap, is seated on a throne from whose base sprouts a mushroom. A floret above the king's head is an annotation for the mushroom's cap as a solar wheel.[69]

A Latin codex of the fourteenth century displays the longevity of the mushroom's symbolism as a Mithraic solar wheel. Mithras, with Phrygian cap, appears in a radiant disk, holding the star-dotted cosmic globe in one hand and a lighted torch in his other. His lower body is replaced by his solar chariot, which is depicted as a pillar stipe with mushroom cap, half of a wheel (with seven spokes) that is both the world-column and solar wheel. The chariot is drawn by four horses, each labeled with the names of the seasons. The two going to the left, where the trees are barren, are autumn and winter. Those going toward the right, where the trees are verdant, are spring and summer.[70]

Mithras has been assimilated here to the Christian God, for the three Pentecostal tongues of flame from his torch as creator of the cosmos are labeled as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Above his head is a single hand pointing upward in salute to the sky above.

Ascension

After the banquet, *Sol-Heliodromos*, with solar whip in hand, radiant with crown and nimbus and clothed only in his flowing sky mantle, escorted Mithras (*Pater*), nude except only for his red Phrygian cap, into his *quadriga*—the chariot drawn by a team of four horses—for the final

apocalyptic ascent, with Hermes-Mercury (Raven) flying ahead and leading the way, caduceus in his outstretched right hand, nude with billowing cape and winged cap. The other side of this relief from the Virunum Mithraeum depicts Phaëthon requesting the solar chariot for the Conflagration, in the presence, as in the Munich codex, of seasons and the winds.[71]

On another relief Mithras holds the Sword of the Accord as he steps into *Sol's* chariot.[72] For the Christians, this was the same event as the soul's acension to heaven in the Prophet Elijah's chariot of fire in a whirlwind drawn by fiery horses.[73] The only change needed was to replace Oceanus with the River Jordan. The Mithraic apocalypse united the first grade with the last to usher in the end of time.

The religion kept its secrets well. The teachings were never codified in official scriptures and thus were free to adapt and assimilate traditions of the many diverse regions where it was spread, especially among the peoples conquered by the Empire's army and administered by its coterie of bureaucrats. The interpretation of the symbols was part of the initiatory indoctrination, which was imparted verbally to the ascendant degrees of membership by the long secession of masters over multiple centuries, and it inevitably was open to evolving times and personal predilections and innovations. The compilation of all the fragmentary monuments of the persecuted and desecrated religion, however, offers us many pieces of a puzzle that we can now, at last, reassemble into a coherent picture. The major key has been the decipherment of a sophisticated system of metaphors, many of them cross-cultural and of the greatest antiquity, stretching back to some of the earliest remnants of the prehistorical record. Such basic metaphoric identities indicate the error of naively equating objects with their full mythological significance, especially in the context of spiritual practices that use the symbols to navigate states of altered consciousness achieved through entheogenic rituals. Seen in this light, *bread* is not ordinary bread, nor is it separable from the metaphor of heaven and its animate plant, animal, and human metamorphism. A bull, furthermore, that is slaughtered on the edge of the universe does not become ordinary beef, especially in the case of Mithras where the agent of the sacrifice is identical with the sacrificial offering; *offerens oblatus*, as the Roman Church encoded the mystery of the Eucharist, "the person offering is the offering." Secondly, the archaeological remains offer clues to the

sacred topography and physical environment where the cult was practiced. Neither the overview of the monuments nor the physical remains were available as evidence prior to the pioneering work of scholars of the past century. When considered all together, the pattern is clear. There was a culminating event, which was enacted as a banquet to celebrate the apocalypse. The final act set the pattern for the release of the aspirant's fiery soul back to the Cosmos, hopefully coinciding with the longed for end of time, when the world became created anew. Both the traditions of the religion and the occasionally more explicit indications in the monumental remains show that the Eucharistic Host was a particular consciousness-altering mushroom, the "offering," which inevitably implies a similar identity for the divine mediator "making the offering."

Since the events enacted in the Mithraeum had astronomical analogues, we must next cast our gaze unto the stars.

ten

The Drama in the Sky

The Heavenly Quartet

The astronomical dimension of Mithraism and its Persian antecedents were well documented in antiquity.[1] The main quartet of figures in the tauroctony, namely the raven, dog, serpent, and scorpion, enacted their drama amongst the constellations as Corvus, Canis Minor, Serpens (Hydra, Draco), and Scorpio, with the Bull as Taurus and its hunter as Orion[2] or Perseus, who is depicted wearing the traditional Phrygian cap in the earliest surviving configurations of him as the stellar constellation.[3] Other elements of the iconography are reflected in the celestial realm as Leo, the lion; Crater (or Aquarius), the cup (or water-bearer); and the star Spica, the sheaf of grain, the *lucida* or brightest star in the constellation Virgo.

> Zoroaster was the first who consecrated in the neighboring mountains of Persia, a spontaneously produced cave, florid, and having fountains, in honor of Mithra, the maker and father of all things; a cave, according to Zoroaster, bearing a resemblance of the cosmos, which was fabricated by Mithra.
>
> —Porphyry

> These things are obscurely hinted at in the accounts of the Persians, and especially in the mysteries of Mithras, which are celebrated amongst them. For in the latter there is a representation of the two heavenly revolutions—of the movement, viz., of the fixed stars, and of that which takes place among the planets, and of the passage of the soul through these.
>
> —Celsus

Precession of the Equinoxes

The Mithraic sky pertains to a particular period of the past, and although there once were other constellations visible together in the summer sky during the passage from spring to autumn, the selected Mithraic ones have a special relevance to the celestial equator, the zodiac, and the equinoxes and solstices. Taurus, with Perseus above it (always visible since it never sinks below the horizon) and Orion (mostly invisible in the spring night sky, although just arising at dawn, and in the fall rising at sunset) beneath it, Serpens, with Crater and Corvus in the middle of its long undulating body, and Scorpio all lie on the celestial equator. This is the projection of the Earth's equator outward onto the rim of the surrounding celestial sphere.

A second band or circuit, at an angle of about twenty-three degrees to the celestial equator, is the so-called elliptic. This is the orbit traced by the Sun in its apparent elliptical or tilted rotation around the Earth.

Thus the universe could be depicted as a sphere bound by two circuits or bands intersecting to form the Greek letter *chi* (X).[4] Although the stars appeared to be fixed in their positions, revolving around the polar axis, the planets, in contrast, were seen to "wander" (hence their name as planets or "wanderers") against the background of the constellations. The Sun's elliptical orbit brought it through a succession of twelve constellations known as the *zodiac*, or "living creatures." The celestial equator and the solar zodiacal elliptic intersect at the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, represented in Mithraic symbolism by the twin torchbearers, with their crossed legs indicating the equinoctial intersections, or analogously by the twin stellar Dioskouroi, who similarly sometimes stand in the one-footed mushroom pose with legs crossed.

The zodiacal points for the equinoctial intersections of the two circles have not remained constant through time, but move backward slowly through the succession of signs in the zodiacal belt, passing from one to the previous, approximately every 2,160 years.[5] This is because there is an additional movement, a very slow wobble in the Earth's axis which varies the celestial marker for true north, and hence the tilt of the earth within its two intersecting bands. This change in the zodiacal markers for the equinoxes is called the "precession of the equinoxes," a term first used by Copernicus.

This phenomenon was supposedly first recognized toward the end of the second century BCE by Hipparchos of Rhodes,[6] who compared earlier records of the equinoctial markers, a matter of some concern and hence histori cal record since they set the times for sowing. Precession also varies the marker that functions as the North Star and hence is a concern for navigators. Some scholars, however, place the discovery earlier, perhaps in the fourth century among the Babylonians by the Chaldean astronomer Kidenas (Kidinnu),[7] or even as early as the third millennium among the Egyptians.[8] Comparison of mythical themes in numerous ancient cultures may indicate that this alteration in the motion of the heavens was known even as early as the Neolithic period.[9] Such awareness, however, differs from the precise calculation or prediction of the periods of time involved in the transition from one zodiacal marker to the next. Nevertheless, many cultures have independently posited an apocalyptic Great Year or astronomical age of approximately the same duration—26,000 years—that corresponds to the time required to circle through all twelve signs of the zodiac.[10]

The Mithraic constellations all lie on the celestial equator as it would have been intersected during the period from about 4000 to 2000 BCE, when the Sun's elliptic orbit would have crossed the celestial equator at the vernal equinox in the zodiacal constellation of Taurus, crossing it again in Scorpio at the autumnal equinox. This period, which corresponds to the probable antiquity of the Indo-Iranian Mithraic rite, is known as the Age of Taurus, which was followed by the Age of Aries, whereas today—and since around the beginning of the Christian era—humanity has been living through the Age of Pisces. In the Mithraic Age of Taurus, the Sun was in the constellation Leo at the summer solstice, and in Aquarius at the winter solstice.

The significance for the initiatory sacrament was great. Taurus and Leo and Bull and Lion are identified with the summer's celestial fire that enters the wintry water vessel of Aquarius for the first stage in the seven grades of the soul's spiritual return to the Empyrean. The process of transmutation was both alchemical and astronomical. Aries the Ram, moreover, figures in Mithraism as an alternative sacrificial victim:

> There is a ladder with lofty gates, and on the top of it an eighth gate. The first gate consists of lead, the second of tin, the third of copper, the fourth of iron, the fifth of a mixture of metals, the sixth of silver, and the seventh of gold. The first gate they assign to Saturn, indicating by the "lead" the slowness of this star; the second to Venus, comparing her to the splendor and softness of tin; the third to Jupiter, being firm and solid; the fourth to Mercury, for both Mercury and iron are fit to endure all things, and are money-making and laborious; the fifth to Mars, because, being composed of a mixture of metals, it is varied and unequal; the sixth, of silver, to the Moon; the seventh, of gold, to the Sun, thus imitating the different colors of the two latter.
>
> —Celsus

Astronomers have claimed Hipparchos as one of their great predecessors, but in antiquity the distinction between the science and its mystical mythological-religious cousin—astrology—could not be made, and the precession of the equinoxes had profound theological implications since the perfect rotation of the double celestial spheres around the geocentric Earth was attributed to deities, as where the planets and constellations with their patron gods and heroes, all testifying to a divine spiritual perfection and predetermined great cycle. This new variable introduced a new and previously unrecognized power.[11]

Eschatology

Stoicism was the philosophical system that assimilated Mithraic astrological Cosmology into the Hellenistic Roman world. One of its leading proponents was Poseidonios of Rhodes (whom Cicero knew personally), incorporating the philosopher's vision of the incarnation of souls from the fiery celestial rim and their final return to an astral eternity, as we have mentioned, in his *Somnium Scipionis*, the *Dream of Scipio*, the section of his *Res Publica* that redoes Plato's Gnostic eschatological "Myth of Er."

It has been suggested that Hipparchos, via Poseidonios and Stoicism, was actually the origin of Mithraism and its myth of the tauroctony, a new

religion and not an assimilation and perpetuation of the ancient Indo-Iranian traditions of the *haoma* sacrament. According to this theory, the inception of the religion is dated to no earlier than about the same time as its introduction into Rome in 67 BCE by the captured Cilician pirates,[12] who as navigators would have had an avid interest in astrological symbolism, in particular the polar marker for the cartographic coordinates.[13] Some would date the origin of Mithraism even later, to the time of Nero's initiation,[14] although presumably there was already a Mithraeum in Rome to use for what was called a series of Nero's "magical dinners."

By this argument, the religion arose from the supposed intense interest in the discovery of the precession of the equinoxes amongst certain intellectual circles in Asia Minor, and that the figure of Mithras is meant to hide the true identity of the bull-slayer as Perseus, the local founder hero of Tarsus and the constellation who brought the Age of Taurus to its end two thousand years earlier. We should note, however, that new religious movements do not arise from rational intellectual debate but from inspired and charismatic prophet-shamans. Nor is it explained why the Mithraic cosmic drama skips back over the newly dawning Age of Pisces and its precedent Aries to represent an equinoctial symbolism of four millennia earlier. Moreover, the paradigm of the End of Days or the Second Coming is another idea shared with Christianity.

> When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.
>
> —*Matthew*, 25.31

Nor—and this is of prime importance—does this theory afford cognizance to the explicit involvement of sacramental drinks or foods[15] in the initiation and to the mythological role of Perseus as the picker of the mushroom,[16] which should offer us a clue that the *haoma* sacrament has been perpetuated since Indo-Iranian times as a fungal entheogen in Greece, as it was in its homeland. A related continuity occurs in Egyptian traditions of the sacred Persian tree or *persea* plant.

Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that the lengthy indoctrination for the ascending grades of initiation was essentially a course of instruction in the science of astronomy—hardly of sufficient interest to account for the

widespread adoption of the religion by the Roman army—only to be told at long last that the ultimate secret of the Mystery was that Mithras was only a cover invented to hide the identity of the true god Perseus from the uninitiated.[17]

Why should such a profound secret have to be divulged to congregations of no more than about thirty men, convening over and over again in their confining Mithraea? These men, for the most part, were not philosophers or sufficiently educated to understand the arcane aspects of the precession of the equinoxes. The theory also fails to explain why the religion of Mithras never took hold in Greece for the simple reason that Greece already had a tradition of a Perseus cult. Still more confusing is the fact that the Mithras myth fits the Age of Taurus, but the Mithraea themselves have been updated to represent the celestial realm for the then current Age of Aries, on the cusp of the coming Age of Pisces.[18]

Thus, as a typical Mithraeum, the image of the universe projected upon the mosaic ledges of the banqueting benches at Ostia's sanctuary of the Seven Planetary Spheres has Aries of the spring equinox on the right side of the Mithras as *tauroctonos* in the eastern cult niche of the altar end, proceeding westward along the north side with the sequence of signs of the zodiac for the summer months (or northern elliptic of the warm months), with Cancer of the summer solstice in the mid-bench niche; while to the left of Mithras along the south side are the winter signs (or southern elliptic, when the months are cold) culminating with Libra of the autumnal equinox, with the mid-bench niche occupied by Capricorn of the winter solstice.

The episode of the tauroctony is not a representation of astronomical events, but a perpetuation of a very ancient complex of traditional images and linguistic metaphors de fining a myth, and an astrological projection of the Mithraic Eucharistic rite upon the rim of the cosmic sphere as it revolved geocentrically around the earth, just as the Mithraea were the egglike microcosmic versions of the great celestial cave.[19]

Thus, too, as we have seen, do the seven planetary deities, rising and setting as entheobotanical apostasies and upon occasion "wandering" into the zodiacal Gates, all figure in the decoration of the sanctuaries or the tauroctony reliefs. It is possible even that certain enigmatic holes piercing the walls and ceilings served an astronomical function as observatories, aligning the timing of the subterranean initiations with paralleled Cosmic

phenomena,[20] for the goal of the initiations was a life stoically in tune with the overall pattern of destiny. Thus the offset scuttle in the roof of the Caesarea Mithraeum seems to have focused a sunbeam on the central altar at the summer solstice. In the Carrawburgh Mithraeum next to Hadrian's Wall, the winter solstice was marked by a sunbeam focused through the exterior and interior doorways upon a statue of Cautes and the image of *Sol* on his altar.[21]

Celestial Toxins

With regard to the entheogenic nature of the Mithraic Eucharist, it is significant that midway between the equinoxes, with the solstice in Leo, stretches the long Serpens, not coiled, but undulating as in the Tauroctony, with Corvus and the Cup or Crater above it. The *krater* may even be an almost too blatant divulgence of the Mystery initiation as an entheogenic potion, since it generally is an element of the Tauroctonies only in the Mithraea of the Rhine and Danube regions, usually coupled with the lion, which similarly is absent from Mithraea elsewhere. The Cup may even hint at the End Time, which was the ultimate goal of the ascending grades of initiation, by simultaneously presenting Leo and Aquarius, the opposed solstices, thus canceling out the circuitous orbiting of linear time. The lion, as previously illustrated, sometimes is even depicted above the Cup, as if diving into the *krater*.[22]

Among their other symbolic associations, both the serpent and the scorpion have poisonous stings, toxins that they derive or inject in ethnobotanical traditions from the plants they feed upon. The Greek magical papyrus that contains the so-called Mithras Liturgy specifically names the plant itself as the "stinger" (*kentritis*).[23] Such also was the source of the bee's sting, which could be transmuted into honey or the entheogenic honey drink. The association of the serpent with the bull entheogen is made explicit in the Poetovio fragment where both the serpent at the wound and the sheaves of grain at the bull's tail have a triple head.[24] Similarly, another relief shows the bull grazing beside what appears to be a large vine with a serpent in it.[25]

In mythical traditions, the Greek hunter Orion was killed by a scorpion and then they both were transported to the stars, located as far apart as

possible, eternally chasing each other. The scorpion was also emblematic of the Egyptian Seth, the enemy of his brother Osiris. The scorpion was deified as the goddess Serket, depicted as a woman with a scorpion on her head, and her involvement with poisons and drugs extended to the funeral rites and the protection of the pharaoh against the great evil serpent Apep. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, scorpion creatures guard the passage into the mountain of the jeweled garden. In Persian mythology, the legendary manticore was imagined as a creature with the head of a man and the winged equestrian body of a lion with red fur and the tail of a scorpion.

The dog's role in lapping up the bull's blood in the tauroctonies similarly suggests entheogenic toxins, for the dog was associated with the netherworld and the journey between metaphysical realms. Among the Egyptian deities, the dog-headed Anubis guided souls of the dead to the presence of Osiris. In Greek traditions, the dog is the companion of Hekate, patroness of herbalist witchcraft. Mithracism assimilated her symbolism. A marble statue of the tri-form Hekate comes from a Sidon Mithraeum[26] as the three-headed Cerberus, the ferocious dog that guards the entrance to the underworld. Thus he is depicted as attendant upon the lion-headed god in the Castel Gandolfo Mithraeum.[27] Hades, the lord of the netherworld, wears a dog's cap. In Zoroastrian tradition, dogs guarded the Bridge of Separation between the two worlds, where the good man met his own soul in the form of the Maiden.[28]

> Then comes the beautiful, well-shaped, strong and well-formed maiden with the dogs at her sides. She makes the soul of the righteous one go up above the Hara-berezaiti; above the Chinwad bridge she places it in the presence of the heavenly gods themselves.
>
> —*Vendidad*

> Run and outspeed the two dogs, Sarama's offspring, brindled, four-eyed, upon thy happy pathway. Draw nigh then to the gracious-minded Fathers where they rejoice in company with Yama. And those two dogs of thine, Yama, the watchers, four-eyed, who look on men and guard the pathway. To Yama pour the Soma.
>
> —*Rig Veda*

The constellation of the Dog was a catasterization (i.e. transport to the stars) of Orthos, "Erect," the herd dog of Geryon's red cattle, the tenth of the Labors of Herakles, an episode with interesting ethnobotanical metaphors since it involves a descendant of Chrysaor ("Golden-pluck"), a double of Perseus, born from the severed neck of the Gorgon Medusa, and Herakles' trip in the drinking cup of Helios, the Sun. The whole episode involves shamanic themes and a mushroom sacrament.[29]

Similarly in the New World, the dead are sometimes accompanied by a dog, as among the Huichol. It may also be significant that the dog, in Mesopotamian traditions as far back as the Old Babylonian Period, is a symbol of Gula, the patroness of herbalism and goddess of healing.[30]

Within this context, the dog and lion are symbolically related and are often interchangeable since they belong to the same family.[31] This interchangeable association of the two animals may explain the inconsistency of the inclusion of the dog and lion in the tauroctonies.

As for the sheaf of grain growing from the slaughtered Bull, even if we discount the *lucida* Spica star as its astrological complement, it cannot be simply an indication, as has been argued,[32] that it merely symbolizes agricultural fertility and the rebirth of vegetation, for the Bull is slaughtered with an implausible harvest implement, and the significance of the grain growing from the wound or tail is that the bull's blood is the vital fluid of the *haoma* entheogen transmuted into the ergot grain surrogate. Thus the grain becomes "medicinal herbs"[33] that sprout from the Bull sacrificed at the beginning of the warm season. The semen-testicles of the slaughtered Bull that the scorpion is seen to grab in its pinchers have a special chthonic role, being preserved for the following year by the zodiacal water sign of Scorpio.

As the most occult sign, Scorpio is associated with the mysteries of sex, death, and rebirth, and it is therefore ideally suited as the keeper of the Bull's seed. Scorpio fulfills its role as the opposite, complement, and apogenesis (second birth) of Taurus.

Both the Serpent and Scorpion also are closely connected with water, which is the prerequisite for fungal growth. It should be noted that as Hydra, it is precisely a water snake and figures in the Apollo Corvus myth of the Raven's eternal thirsting.

Generally, moreover, two crops of grain, if that is what we are speaking of, were planted: the winter crop, which was the more dependable, planted not so late as the winter solstice; and the summer crop around the vernal equinox. Cautes, as the vernal equinox, and Cautopates, as the autumnal, are similarly antipodal, thus Cautes sometimes holds a bull's head, presiding over the descent of incarnation, while his twin Cautopates holds a scorpion for the resurrection, the two directions involved in the generation of the entheogen.[34]

Quite simply, to think that the Mithraic initiation was all about what happens among the stars is as erroneous as thinking that alchemy was all about what happens in the crucible.

Mapping the Heavens

Needless to say, the naming of the constellations has very little to do with their appearance. Even though the night sky in earlier times had more stars visible which ordinarily today are obscured by Earth-level artificial illumination, nevertheless the grouping of the salient stars into particular configurations is variable, and the image that they supposedly present is a fanciful projection of human concepts upon the celestial dome. For the most part, the mythical projections are inherited cultural assimilations. The identification of the constellation as a bull can be traced back to Babylonian astronomy. The Mayans, however, saw an owl. The Chinese divide the zodiac differently, into four regions, each with seven mansions, none of them corresponding to a bull.

The constellation Taurus, which figures so prominently in the tauroctony, is basically only a "Y" shape, with a horizontal extension from the juncture suggesting the back of a bull lunging. The *mu* syllable in the Cretan-Minoan syllabary is this same Y configuration, fleshed out with the side jowls. It associated the *mu* with the mooing-bellowing of cattle, and it passed little changed into the Classical Greek alphabet, which was actually the Phoenician consonantal script and identical to the Roman consonant, stylized and recognizable in the letter M. The origin of the signs is traceable back to Babylonian cuneiform. The M is also a pictograph of waves or water.

Beginning around 4000 BCE, this stellar configuration in the zodiac belt marked the rising of the Sun at the vernal equinox for about 2000 years. This would have lent it particular significance, but its identification as a bull relates to the importance of this date on Earth. The V of the bull's horns is also identified as the Hyades, as the sisterhood who while still on earth nursed the infant Dionysus, thus associating the bull with intoxication. Hyas, in fact, is another name for Dionysus as "bull-horned."[35] As similar association occurs in the mythical identification of the bull as the taurine manifestation that Zeus assumed for the shamanic abduction of Europa. The Hyades are eternally mourning the death of their brother the hunter Hyas or the "bull-horned" Dionysus, and thus their incorporation into the bull's head marks the vernal equinox as the commencement of the spring rains, or, as in Egypt, the flooding of the Nile. Another cluster of stars at the tail end of the Bull was fantasized as the seven Pleiades, another sisterhood of perpetual weepers. Their name is etymologically derived from *plein* ("to sail"), inasmuch as the vernal equinox also marked the season of calm seas for sailing.[36] The Pleiades are weeping either for the fate of their father Atlas, who is forced to hold the celestial globe, or for the plight of their fellow sister, the Hyades.

The sisterhoods are in the entourage of Artemis, the Huntress, and are either mourning the "hunter" Dionysus or are fleeing the advances of the "hunter" Orion. As we have seen, Orion is etymologically derived from *ouein* ("to urinate"),[37] with its implications of the mushroom urine-drink, and his birth was from a bull's hide. Orion was visualized in the sky as a giant wielding a club and also as an archer with a shield.[38] The actual pattern, however, is three close and bright stars, supposedly the giant's belt, with four stars, two above and two below, about equally distant, presenting a configuration like the letter H, with its vertical lines inclined inward on both sides toward the crossbar of the belt. An additional star (below the belt and midway between the legs) occurs in the region of the giant's genitals. It requires considerable imagination to flesh this out as the cinctured torso, headless and without upraised weapons, the flexed legs invisible below the knees, and the star between the legs as the tip of a sword dangling from the belt.

In the heavens, Orion is attacking Taurus above him. It requires considerably more imagination to visualize Perseus, who is similarly

attacking the Bull below him. The salient feature is the variable star Argol (from the Arabic *al-Ghul*, meaning "the ghoul" or "Demon Star"), which appears to vary its intensity within a cycle of roughly three days.[39] This represents the "winking" eye of the Gorgon head, dangling from the arm of the hero who harvested it. The other stars trace the line up his arm to his shoulder and nape, then down his torso to his groin, where his legs divide—one descending to his ankle, while the other is flexed as if running. It is the winking Gorgon head, however, that defines this constellation. Since the mooing-bellowing Gorgon head that Perseus harvested is an anthropomorphized mushroom, the Bull that he joins Orion in hunting has a similar botanical identity. Characteristic of the bull in ritual is its sympathetic identification with its sacrificer. Thus in the heavens are mapped the essentials of the Mithraic Tauroctony, the messianic self-immolation of the savior and the botanical consubstantiality of the hunter and his prey, for we must remember that Perseus, no less than Orion and Mithras, had a manner of birth similar to mushrooms.

The most noticeable star in the region beneath Orion is the blazing many-colored Sirius, the Dog Star, which can be fleshed out as the mouth of a dog with other stars forming the body, legs, and tail of the constellation Canis Major.[40] It is the brightest and closest star, another sun. Its name is the Latinized version of its Greek name as the "scorcher," cognate with the Sanskrit *Surya*, the Sun god as the "shining one," and its name in Arabic as *al Shi'ra*. The Byzantine lexicographer Suidas glosses *seir* as another word for "Sun." Canis Major became the hunting dog of Orion, or alternatively it is associated with Artemis as one of the hounds of Actaeon who attacked the hunter as he metamorphosed into a stag, or with a bull as the guard dog of Europa when Zeus abducted her. Its heliacal rising at the summer solstice in the Age of Taurus, and its not-visible passage in conjunction with the Sun through the bright skies of midsummer ushered in a period of intense heat, the so-called dog days that were supposed to induce madness. The dog's spittle was also seen as the source of honey, sucked up and alchemically digested by bees. The mad dog, foaming at the mouth, is rabid, reverting to a wolf, and Sirius is identified as a dog in numerous cultures. For the Chinese it is actually the heavenly wolf, but it is its association with rabidity and celestial intoxicating honey that most concerns us in this context. The Greek *Seirios* is the same root found in the sirens

(*Seirenes*) as enchantresses, which was also the name given to a kind of bee. The Egyptian cow goddess Hathor bears it between her horns, and it is the target for an arrow aimed at in the Dendera Temple, probably with its connotations of the toxins of intoxication. It is similarly associated with an arrow in Chinese and later Persian traditions. Sirius, moreover, was identified with Iakchos, a doublet of Dionysus, who led the Eleusinian initiates in the Greater Mystery ritual.

It also, by another tradition, is Maira the "Sparkler," the dog of Dionysus, involved in the discovery of the first vine plant. Actually, this dog is Canis Minor, the pre-dog or Procyon (i.e., wolf), which is also the name of its *lucida* or brightest star. The two canines are situated together on opposite sides of the river of celestial cow's milk known as the Milky Way. Maira was the canine identity of the neth erworld goddess Hekate (Hecate), the patroness of pharmaceutical witchcraft.

The Taurus region of the zodiac has obvious Mithraic implications. It is hard to agree with Ulansey, however, in dating the origin of the religion to around 126 BCE when Hipparchos measured the precise periods of time involved in the recession of the equinoxes, a phenomenon that had been noticed, in any case, well before that date. The Age of Taurus had already ended two millennia earlier, nor had it occasioned the apocalyptic End Time. The world was now in the Age of Aries, which was about to end as well. This may have influenced Paul, who was probably an initiate before his conversion, to interpret the sacrifice of the Lamb as the sign of the dawning new Age of Pisces the Fish, which became a Christian symbol. Similarly, the intersection of the celestial equator and the solar ecliptic where Mithras sacrificed himself as the Bull prefigured the crucifixion of the Christ. Nor does it seem likely that in a mere fifty years the new religion could have spread to the Cilician pirates that Pompey took captive to Rome. It also ignores the religion espoused by the Achaemenid Persians already by the sixth century BCE. Although a distinction can be made between Roman Mithraism and the more ancient Mithraic religion, the essential tradition of the visionary sacrament, which goes back at least to the *Rig Veda*, perhaps indicates the continuity of a warrior brotherhood with only superficial differences in ritual and dogma. Similarly, the myth of Perseus as the founder of Mycenae belongs to the oldest stratum of Greek oral history.[41]

Ulansey argues that the pirates, like all sailors, were dependent on the stars for navigation and thus would have been especially receptive to religious ideas about a god who had dominion over the stars. The precession of the equinoxes, however, would have had little relevance to the daily procedures for sailing, which were essentially unchanged from Homeric times. The pirates were a motley group of what in other times would be termed soldiers of fortune, putting ashore for revelry and debauchery, robbing towns and religious sanctuaries of their treasures, but primarily gaining their wealth from kidnappings and the slave trade.[42] They hired themselves out as mercenaries to Mithridates,[43] which is why they were synonymous with the Roman war against the king. More than a fascination with new philosophical theories about the cosmos, it is their communal brotherhood as warriors initiated into a long tradition of Persian soldiering that would more properly characterize them.

Rather, it appears, the process of projecting the same metaphoric patterns upon the celestial dome continued. The constellation of Aries has a configuration very similar to the horned bull-head of Taurus, and mythically this was the golden Ram that Phrixos sacrificed in Medea's Colchis, the golden fleece that was hung on the Sacred Tree as its golden apple, and that the hero Iason (Jason), the "drug man," plucked, in a repetition of the feat that Perseus accomplished in picking the mushroom at Mycenae and harvesting the head of the Gorgon Medusa.[44]

As much as it is a star map, the drama in the skies is also an encoded homologue of the *haoma* sacrament. The slaughter of the Bull by the hero deity it represents—whether Gorgon and Perseus or Cosmic Bull and Mithras—is at basis a myth of the harvest of the sacred plant and its cosmological or astronomical ramifications in the catasterization of its attendant agents. Like other Cosmocrators, Mithras not only creates our world but also mediates its relation or communion with the astro-theological deities from his central earthly position at the celestial equator. He is, in fact, actually inside the Cosmic cave that becomes our world when he performs the fateful deed. The planets and zodiacal configurations all participate in establishing the gates and pathways for the recycling both of the heavenly elixir and for the thirsting sparks of life nourished on it.

eleven

Freemasonry and the Survival of the Eucharistic Brotherhoods[1]

The significance of Mithraism as the first historical, pan-Eurasian religion has never been fully appreciated by European scholarship, which persistently has tried to draw an iron curtain between the East and West. In various forms, however, Mithraism has left an indelible and defining mark on the religious history of that vast continent. Christianity was at the same time the greatest benefactor as well as the most destructive scourge of Mithraic tradition. While destroying or vandalizing the material cultural remains of that once great religion, early Christians also copied and coopted its outward forms in many details, building upon its successes and learning from its limitations. Indeed, both literally and figuratively, Christianity was built upon Mithraic foundations.

> Mithras, God of the Sunset, low on the Western main.
> Thou descending immortal, immortal to rise again!
> Now when the watch is ended, now when the wine is drawn,
> Mithras, also a soldier, keep us pure till the dawn!
>
> —*Song to Mithras*, Rudyard Kipling[2]

Such dependence was a great liability to a Church claiming a new and original dispensation, and every effort was made to suppress the commonalities. For the most part, this meant emphasizing the more obvious mythological and dogmatic differences, but this was hardly enough to demonstrate an essential practical difference between the visionary Eucharistic practices of the two competing Mystery religions. In fact, the shared gnosis seemed to validate the syncretism and cooption that had so

obviously occurred—even in the outward expressions—of the old and new "official" religions of the Empire.

For the ancients, such a situation was the norm, that the unitive experiences elicited by the various Mysteries all demonstrated an essential and universal identification not only between the rites of particular gods and goddesses, but also between deities and the celebrants, and between the celebrants and the cocreative as a whole. The great religions of the Roman Empire were the Mysteries of Mithraism, Isis, and Christianity, with the Greek Eleusinian Mystery probably setting the Classical paradigm, relating the risen grain to its wild, uncultivated antecedents, with consciousness-altering mushrooms and ergot having an essential role in mediating the dichotomy. Judaism remained apart because of its ethnic exclusivity, although an argument can be made that the Jews were exposed to Mithraic ideology during the sixth-century Babylonian captivity, in particular to the cult of warriors, which would surface later in nationalistic zealot communities like the Essenes, from which Jesus arose as a national liberator.[3]

Given such an underlying assumption of Gnosis as a defining experience at the esoteric core of all the Mysteries, doctrinal differences were only of marginal concern, and literal interpretations were easily abandoned in favor of a mythological richness infused and sacralized by a common gnosis.

Mithraism was a formative element in the radical syncretism that characterized much of Classical spirituality. Considered in these terms, it is important to note that Christianity came to stand in polar opposition to this synthesizing and comparatively tolerant attitude toward other religions. In fact, it is justifiable to consider Christianity's claim to originality and the sole source of spiritual salvation as the only truly original and distinguishing characteristic of the new religion—this along with its insistence on the literal historical veracity of its savior and his miracles.

While Imperial Rome was singularly influential in popularizing and codifying both religions, we must recognize a common ecstatic and communal thread in them that starts in the earliest strata of Indo-European traditions and extends even into the presentintact in its esoteric, entheogenic essence.

At the very root of the Mithraic Mysteries lay esoteric mythological, astrological, and pharmacological lore that was not easily suppressed, let alone destroyed. The long and dauntingly complex history of Mithraism in Eurasia had inseparably woven its mythopoeia into the very fabric of religious intellectual, artistic, and literary culture through out the Persian and Classical worlds. As Mithraism faded as a world religion, its venerable esoteric cannon became a river, fed by streams of derivative and original Gnostic tradition. It is quite clearly this ancient torrent that sustained and characterized the post-Christian alchemical, Hermetic, and literary undercurrent, erupting throughout history in the various popular Gnostic revivals which were, repeatedly and often violently, suppressed by the Church Triumphant, which opposed personal mysticism and insisted on imposing itself as the essential mediator with the deity.[4]

A Bishop's Mithraic Tomb

Even though officially extinct, Mithraism persisted in some locales as an assimilation with Christianity. Nor did the conversion of the Empire immediately obliterate all observances of the ancient Mysteries,[5] which also resurfaced later, if indeed they had even disappeared,[6] under the guise of the Renaissance enthusiasm for antiquity[7] and probably were reintroduced into Europe after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. In the East, the Orthodox Church and Byzantium, in fact, more openly assimilated and thus perpetuated Mithraism. A Russian icon of the seventeenth century, now in the Moscow Kremlin State Museum, depicts the Holy Trinity with Mithras unmistakably in the forefront slaughtering the bull: he is astride its back, as if taking a trip on it, as he draws the neck back to plunge the sword for the kill.[8] Even more explicit is the letter written by a certain monk named Vylinja from the holy mountain, Mount Athos of the Greek Orthodox Church, in response to six renegade bishops (Archbishop Raboza et al.), who had accepted union with the Roman Church at the meeting in Brest in 1596. In enumerating the many miracles through which God has shown his favor to the holy mountain, he records one in which the Eucharistic table metamorphosed into the holy mushroom, which cured multitudes from their infirmities:

> When the names of the forty martyrs were pronounced by the archpriest, there began to grow from the foot of the holy table a holy mushroom with its cap in the shape of forty apples, which ascended over the holy table and overshadowed the entire sanctuary. And for this most glorious miracle all present gave glory to God and to the forty martyrs. And then all the infirm found in the cloister were healed through the tasting of the holy mushroom. And this miracle was pronounced throughout the entire ecumene and great multitudes were healed.[9]

Typical of the way that Christian sanctuaries were built above pagan remains is the Cathedral of San Salvador in Ávila, built partially into the city's walls. It replaced a nearby Mithraeum just outside, but it perpetuated aspects of the supposedly displaced pagan god's symbolism and initiatory Eucharist in a manner that indicates that the old religion's rites have been assimilated into the Catholic ritual, especially for its ecclesiastical elite. Such instances offer still further confirmation of the entheogenic identity of the sacrament.

In the cathedral's crypt is the tomb of Don Fernando Rodríguez, a bishop laid to rest in the year 1292. The crypt is conceived of as the Mithraic Cosmic cave from which the initiate would be resurrected. On the wall just above the bishop, sculpted in marble, lying at peace on the lid of his sarcophagus, is a plaque depicting him in bas-relief rising out of the stone chamber of his interment like Mithras for the resurrected birth, thrust upward from the pinecone rock. Twin angels replace the attendant torchbearers. Although nothing else is known of him, the fact that he was accorded space in the Cathedral's crypt indicates that he must have been of considerable importance.[10]

Mithraic Resurrection. *Pinecone Birth. Marble plaque Tomb of Fernando Rodriguez, Avila Cathedral of San Salvador.*

This scene enacted in the secluded crypt of this cosmic cave would have had special appeal for those anchoritic friars who had withdrawn from this world to lead a life of self-denial and hermitage. For Don Fernando, the Mithraic birth, traditionally located beneath the Tree of Paradise, probably signified his own resurrection in the likeness of the New Adam, redeemed as Cosmic Anthropos, a common theme in hermetic, gnostic, and related ancient wisdom traditions perpetuated in the medieval period by the alchemists.[11] Christ was seen as the redemption of the original Man, for Adam was created from clay, which has been assimilated here to the cosmic egg-rock or pinecone. Upon their births, both Adam and Mithras emerge nude from the dust of the earth with fiery connotations and cover themselves with leaves from the Tree.[12] Notice also that the prayerful position of the subject create a strong homologue of the Amanita mushroom, reinforced by the bulbous shape of the pinecone from which he emerges. Both the halo and the torso are outlined with crimson paint, and the decorative motive framing the scene terminates atop with a curiously fungal design.

Mushroom-Phallus Frieze. *Decorative motif, sarcophagus of Don Fernando.*

The entire entablature above the Mithraic birth displays a curious decorative motif, unique to this tomb and appearing nowhere else in the cathedral or all of Ávila. At first it might be mistaken for a celestial city, gateways and turreted or domed buildings then the design, like an optical illusion, clarifies and becomes a frieze of mushrooms, the domes being the fully expanded caps, with the turreted buildings distinctly the phalloid phase of the same mushrooms.

It is not illusion, a trick of our eyes. It would appear that the good friar was privy to the secret of the *haoma* Eucharist, since he chose to depict his resurrection in this manner. We should recall that the west portal of the nearby Basilica of San Vicente even displays an agaric mushroom as the food of the heavenly banquet,[13] and the martyred namesake has a similar Mithraic entombment in its crypt.[14]

Even if persecuted and coopted by Christianity in the West, Mithraism (and Manichaeism, and other heresies with their Christianized version of the same and similar sacraments) continued to thrive in the East and would inevitably have spawned renewed interest in the entheogenic Eucharist by the returning Crusaders, who themselves were devotees of esoteric Mystery religions, like the Knights Templar, and must have been struck by the similarity of their Christianity to the Eucharistic religion of Mithras.

As part of the profound impact of Europe's discovery of the roots of its own spiritual tradition, Mithraic undercurrents quickly rose to the surface of religious consciousness and contributed greatly to the success of Manichaeism and similar Gnostic religions, becoming popular or

"democratized" movements that directly challenged and threatened the spiritual and secular authority of the Roman Church. Mithraism, moreover, persists in mystical traditions of Islam, such as Sufism,[15] and in local magical customs and folk practices where there once was a Mithraeum. Even the elite within the Church as recently as the twentieth century have managed to overlook or reconcile their views with the official condemnation of the old rituals.[16]

Freemasonry

Surviving into modern times and deriving from uncertain and legendary sources, Freemasonry is the most notable of the secret societies that have perpetuated the pre-Christian Mysteries and the earliest neopagan revival, predating the Wiccan movement.[17] It was also spelled Phremasonry, which suggests some attempt to connect it with Phrygian antecedents or Egyptian sun worship.[18]

> Come and reveal thyself to this boy here today, for I will glorify thee in heaven before Phre, I will glorify thee before the Moon, I will glorify thee on Earth. I am he whom you met under the holy mountain to whom you gave the knowledge of your greatest Name, which I shall keep it holy, communicating it to none save to your fellow initiates in your holy rites.
>
> —*Papyri Graecae Magicae*, 12.92 *et seq*.

Although it is true that over the centuries the Masons have been accused of all manner of conspiratorial and diabolical activity (usually, as has been the case with other "secret" societies throughout history, with circumstantial, partial understanding, and paranoid zealotry), there can be no doubt that Masonic lodges were indeed hotbeds of pro-revolutionary sentiment and the philosophies of the Enlightenment that opposed the feudal *Ancien Régime* with a new world order illuminated and inspired by the Classical Revival that had first found popular expression in the Renaissance. There can also be no doubt that Masonic membership was often made up of the social and intellectual elite who were the driving force behind the revolutions that established the political reality of a new social

paradigm—a paradigm is at least as defining a characteristic of modernity as the industrial revolution.

Claiming to be the inheritors and preservers of ancient mysteries via direct lines of descent going back at least to the time of the Knights Templar, Masonic symbolism does seem to betray a cohesive and accurate synopsis of the ancient Mysteries. As "masons," they were metaphorically engaged in building a new world order, and their status as "free" meant that they acknowledged no feudal overlord. They were then the inheritors of the traditions of the Knights Templar, who were engaged in restoring the old Temple.

Although the activities of secret societies offer vast scope for the prurient imagination of outsiders, especially when religion is involved, certain aspects of the charges brought against the Templars suggest that they perpetuated the *Nymphus* grade of the Mithraic initiation. Similarly, although the rites of Freemasonry are performed today in sanitized versions with little or no understanding of their antecedents, the candidate experiences something reminiscent of the mock interment of the Raven grade, and the *Osculum pacis* or "kiss of Peace" is supposedly adopted from the ancient Templars.

> Furthermore, in the initiation of the brothers of the afore-mentioned Order, the novice was required to kiss the receiver on the mouth, the navel, the naked belly, and on the anus or lower spine and sometimes on the male appendage.
>
> —*Procés des Templiers*[19]

> I have been in the grave, I have triumphed over it by rising from the dead, and being regenerated in the process, I have a claim to life everlasting.
>
> —Text of Freemasonry Initiation

Free Masons

The officially endorsed history of Freemasonry prefers to date its inception to the year 1717, when four lodges in London dined together and combined to form the first Grand Lodge of England. Internal dispute led to the

formation of a splinter group in 1751, the "Antient Grand Lodge of England." The differences were resolved and the two groups reunited in 1813 as the "United Grand Lodge of England." Meanwhile Grand Lodges were formed also in Ireland and Scotland and were exported to the continent and the colonies.

The official claim of the London-based inception of the society, however, had political motivation to exclude Scotland's primacy, with a Grand Lodge (listed as number zero) whose constitution is dated before 1598 and was already in existence as a society in 1140. This is the "antient" tradition, as they styled themselves, using the archaic spelling for the word *ancient*. Scottish Freemasonry always acknowledged their king as Grandmaster and had earlier been exported as well to the Continent. In 1603, James VI of Scotland, the son of the beheaded Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, brought Freemasonry with him when he became James I of Britain, succeeding the last Tudor, Elizabeth I. His son Charles I was executed by Cromwell, who in turn was succeeded by a return to the monarchy under James II. James was deposed in 1701, and his Jacobite supporters made the Scottish mystical "ancient" Cabalistic version of Freemasonry politically suspect, if not downright seditious.

The 1717 London-based version of Hanoverian-Whig Masonry established a modern symbolic reinterpretation, disowning the hermetic and Rosicrucian traditions, which were preserved in the visionary rituals of "high-degree" Masonry in the lodges of the Jacobite partisans and exiles in Europe and the New World. This is the tradition that understandably espoused revolution and became involved in the political turmoil that surfaced in France and the colonies. Not only were many of the soldiers in the revolutions Freemasons, but even more threatening, Napoléon had himself initiated in a special lodge convened within the Great Pyramid of Giza.

The modern reformed version of Freemasonry traces its origin back to trade guilds of medieval itinerant stonemasons, who were free men and sought lodging where they were employed by proving membership by a secret handshake and special knock on the lodge's door. These were builders, who today are replaced by non-, building not actual temples but striving allegorically and metaphor of the stonemason's craft to construct better exemplars of themselves, through rituals whose meaning is lost or

known perhaps to only a few. The exclusion of women is justified by the simple fact that in the medieval period they were not involved in actual construction. Architectural geometric perfection, such as squareness and right angles, qualities required in the building trade, is interpreted as spiritual virtue.

It is the secrets of the other branch of Freemasonry that concerns us. It is also an area of the wildest speculation and flights of fantasy, with some claiming Stonehenge or the Book of Enoch, discovered among the Qumran scrolls, and the Egyptian Thoth as precedents. The first known Masonic text is the Halliwell manuscript or "Regius Poem," written sometime between the late 1300s and the middle of the fifteenth century apparently by a clergyman from the west of England. It claims Euclid and the invention of geometry in Egypt as the origin of the fellowship and says it was brought to England during the reign of King Athelstan (924–938). This would be conveniently early enough for the Masons to be involved with the Knights Templar, who were established after the First Crusade and existed approximately from 1118 to 1312, when they fell victim to the Inquisition. Although the title is used today as an international philanthropic Masonic order within Freemasonry, there is no evidence connecting them to the medieval Templars.

The latter was a monastic group created to protect pilgrims to the Holy Lands, and although devoted to poverty, they became extremely wealthy, either as recipients of donations or through acting as bankers or, as some suspect, because of some discovery. They were headquartered on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, above what they thought were the ruins of Solomon's Temple, hence their designation as Templars. The Templars, it appears, actually conducted archaeological excavation beneath the Temple Mount, and legend has it that they discovered two pillars of knowledge engraved with the secrets of science. These pillars are prominent in the rituals of Freemasonry, but what the Templars actually found, if anything, is open to speculation. They also would have employed Egyptians as indigenous workmen, who may have returned with them after the Crusades. Freemasons, either metaphorically or in some sects actually, intend to rebuild the Temple of Solomon.

It is claimed—and also denied—that during the Inquisition certain Templars sought refuge in Scotland with Robert the Bruce (Robert I, King

of the Scots, 1274–1329), bringing with them what would become the York Rite of Freemasonry. It is true that the Bruce appears to have been a Templar sympathizer and even wanted his embalmed heart taken on a Crusade to be buried in Jerusalem. If he had supported the fugitive Templars, he would have done so in secret to avoid problems with Rome or King Philip IV of France, who had instigated the persecution to avoid his debts to the Templars. Supposedly, Sir William Sinclair (St. Clair) was himself a Templar or was initiated into their secret rites. He fought with Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, supported by Egyptians who may have been gypsies. One hundred fifty years later, a Sir William, his descendant, built Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh. His ancestor Henri St. Clair, First Earl of Roslin, had served on the First Crusade with Hugue de Payen, first Grand Master of the Knights Templar, and Hugue visited Roslin in 1126, where he was given the land where the Chapel now stands. It is claimed—and also denied—that Rosslyn is replete with Masonic and Templar symbolism, built on the plan of Herod's Temple. The Sinclairs even claim that they are of the lineage of Jesus, through his marriage to Mary Magdalene. The First Grand Lodge of Scotland was formed in 1736, with a William St. Clair of Roslin as its Grand Master.

Freemasonry also became involved in alchemy. Many prominent Masons met during the Cromwellian Protectorate as what they called an invisible college to protect esoteric knowledge and scientific advances that the Church deemed heretical. These included Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Robert Moray, Christopher Wren, and Elias Ashmole, men with a profound interest in astronomy and magic. They were Jacobite supporters and with the restoration of the monarchy, Charles II granted them a charter in 1662 as the Royal Society. Virtually all of the founding members were Freemasons, and their designation as a college honors their allegiance to the Rosicrucians, a secret society of mystics allegedly formed in late medieval Germany by a pseudonymous alchemist, Christian Rosenkreuz. The Rosy Cross is a symbol for the Philosopher's Stone and a degree in Masonic initiation.

Some claim that various traditions of Scottish Freemasonry can even be traced back to Mithraism. The "painted" tribesmen or Picti of Scotland would have encountered Mithraea of the Roman soldiers along Hadrian's Wall. Since they remained outside the Empire, the Christian conversion

would have left them unchanged. They might also have similarly absorbed elements of Egyptian lore as the Mystery religion of Isis. In any case, Roman Mithraism had already assimilated Egyptian symbolism.

The orb surmounted by the cross (the *globus cruciger*), sometimes rotated so that it is more like an X, represents the sphere of the universe and the intersection of the celestial equator. The solar ecliptic became a common emblem, both of Christianity and alchemy, and was frequently adopted as a monarchical badge of terrestrial empowerment. This diagonal cross or saltire is called the *Crux decussata* or the Saint Andrew's Cross, since he was supposedly martyred on such a cross, and can be traced back to Persian solar symbolism in the coinage of Persepolis. It forms the national flag of Scotland. In alchemy, the *globus cruciger* is the symbol for antimony, apparently since it was thought to be useful in transmuting lead to gold, and hence appropriately assigned this emblem of empowerment. Since the goal of the alchemical work was actually spiritual transcendence affected through material manipulations, it is probably significant that the ancients knew of it primarily as the metallic distillate that the Arabs called *kohl* (as in alcohol, when is was discovered later in the medieval period). The main use of *kohl* was in the preparation of eye makeup, cosmetically enlarging the eye and associating it metaphorically with vision. The Greeks knew of it as *stimmi*, and described as *platyophthamos* or "wide-eyed." In fact, the word for cosmetic in Greek was *pharmakon*, a "drug." The two significances of the *globus crucifer* merge when the orb is supported on a base so that the whole becomes a typical medieval ciborium to house the Eucharistic sacrament. Thus also the X configuration of the intersection of the two orbits can be represented by the crossed keys of the heavens as they are depicted in the Vatican emblem of the Papal *inter regnum*, which is termed the *Sede Vacante*, "when the throne is vacant." In this configuration, the Cosmic Egg tiara of the Pope's three realms of jurisdiction surmounted with the Crucifix as the *globus cruciger* is replaced by a parasol, a common mushroom metaphor, surmounted by the cross, as an *umbraculum cruciger* —a perhaps gratuitous observation were it not that the vacant throne itself can be depicted beneath the umbrella engraved with mushrooms.[20]

The Knights Templar adopted the *Crux decussata* as their flag and emblem. They depicted it as crossed leg bones, beneath a skull, supposedly as a reference to Golgotha, the Hill of Skulls of the, but perhaps also not

without knowledge of the skull cup (Medusa head mushroom cap) that contained the potion of the Zoroastrians. This is especially likely because in Templar lore the skull is indeed that of a Lady of Maraclea,[21] a beloved of a Knight from Sidonhe used her skull as a magical weapon, just as Perseus used the Gorgon head. This Skull of Sidon appears to have been an actual treasure of the Templars, and some speculate that it is the Grail, or its equivalent as the bloodline of Mary through the Magdalene. The legend was used in evidence at the trial of the Templars in the Inquisition, since the Lady was from Armenia, which implicated the Knights with the Bogomils and Cathars, and the supposed heresy of their fondness for mushrooms. The use of the skull and crossbones as a flag of piracy[22] may date back, as some claim, to the pirating activities of the Templars. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the Templar flag was black since the *Crux* was red, probably the origin of the Jolly Roger (first documented in the early eighteenth century) designation as the *jolie rouge* or "pretty red," although some claim it was named for the Templar named Roger (King Roger II of Sicily, *ca*. 1095–1154). Although this magical and probably fungal-chalice Skull of Sidon is an integral element in the lore of the Templars, it may not have figured in the blazon of their flag.

This Skull of Sidon is thematically indistinguishable from the Skull of Adam. As early as Origen at the beginning of the second century, Golgotha was identified as the *omphalos* or center of the earth and the burial site of Adam.[23] This skull was red. It is often depicted in Renaissance art with the leg bones at the base of the Crucifix, like a goblet receiving the Eucharistic blood flowing from the Messiah.[24] In early manuscripts Adam himself rises from his sepulcher to catch the blood in a chalice.[25] Adam was red from the moment of his creation and so named as DM, *adamah* as "clayey red earth" and *dam* as "red blood." Sometimes there is also a red cowbull beneath the being slaughtered on an altar. The book of *Numbers* (19.2 *et seq.*) specifies the slaughter of a perfectly red heifer (cowbull) for the preparation of a purifying potion comprised of its ashes, and the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* identified the crucified Christ as that red animal.[26] These traditions also identify Christ as the redemption of Adam, and the Tree of Eden with the Tree of the Crucifixion, making the forbidden fruit synonymous with the body hanging on the cross. Needless to say, the red Adam-head at the base of the Tree filling with the red resuscitating blood of the deity

consubstantial with the sacrificed bull is located exactly where one might expect to find the magical plant of the Eucharist.

The skull and crossbones figured in the ornamentation of Christian and Jewish cemeteries, where its sinister implication of death is mitigated by the promise of renewal, with winged skulls flying off to Paradise. It has become the common icon for danger and toxins. The crossed leg bones recall the cross-legged twin torchbearers of Mithraism, the twinned intersection of the orbits marking the vernal and autumnal equinoxes.

The skull and crossbones are a prominent symbol in Freemasonry, as well as other military fraternities, particularly those of the Prussians, Germans, British, and the United States. It recalls the symbolic initiatory death of the Raven grade. The Raven is the one who serves the raven's bread at the Eucharistic supper.

The *Crux decussata* was actually the form of the Cross that Constantine saw either in a dream or shining imposed across the sun in the sky, in the hagiographic tradition that records his sudden conversion, like that of Paul, to Christianity. He supposedly had it placed on the shields of his soldiers and it became his military standard. He also used it as a flag. Earlier he had styled himself as the *Sol Invictus*. Christian historians described it as the Greek letter *chi* imposed upon the letter *rho* so that it abbreviated the name of *Christos*, thus expropriating its symbolism for the new version of the foreign Savior. It is unlikely that the warrior cults of late antiquity abandoned it before its reappearance as the Templar emblem.

Iconography

Iconographic items for Freemasonry such as the Sun, the all-seeing disembodied eye, the *ouroboros*, the sacred evergreen, and, most importantly for us, the red Phrygian cap atop a spear or Sword of the Accord are all elements well known to the ancient religions, possessing profound meanings to those initiates who learned of their true significance and interconnections.

While most of these symbols are common to alchemical and Masonic imagery, the origin of the so-called "liberty pole" and "liberty cap" is less familiar. It goes without saying, however, that all elements are to be understood as cryptic references that simultaneously both conceal and

reveal arcane mysteries. The fundamental innovation promulgated in the revolutionary ideal is the dependence upon a kind of Natural Law—as well as the necessary and ongoing revelation of the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of citizens—as the nourishing and necessary spirit upon which a republican democracy might stand. Similarly, Thomas Jefferson appealed to the need for eternal vigilance on the part of citizens in maintaining such a government.

While the American Revolution unfolded an ocean away from the entrenched monarchies of Europe, the philosophical and political culture in which its revolutionary ideas fermented was fundamentally Continental. Encouraged by the American success, a democratic fervor set Europe—especially France—ablaze with a call for an inevitable and radical reappraisal of basic political and social suppositions.

The uncanny correspondence between Mithraic, Masonic, and revolutionary esoteric symbolism is displayed in the various illuminated versions of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (*Déclaration des droits de l'homme*). The drafting of this document (largely by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1789) was seen as the end of the *Ancien Regime*. Politically and socially, a new day was dawning on the Continent as the intoxicating concepts of Reason, Liberty, and Equality spread over the Western world. A great democratic experiment had taken place across the Atlantic, paving the way for the political application of the philosophy of the Enlightenment in Europe.

Delineating the liberties of the individual citizen, the *Déclaration* was inspired by, and reads very much like, the American Bill of Rights, similarly consisting of a short preamble and seventeen articles. It establishes the rights to liberty, equality under law, private property, and asserts the separation of powers and abolished feudal rights in France.

At the visual focus of this illuminated document (and its copies), and set apart with striking contrast, we find a familiar Mithraic motif—a red Phrygian cap set atop the shining white steel of a weapon, itself braced vertically, Excalibur-like, into the presumed bedrock. Should one doubt the symbolic significance of this spear and its Mithraic equivalent, the sword or *harpe*, attention is directed to the fasces which otherwise would remain inexplicable in this context. The barsom is the Persian equivalent of the Roman fasces, an assemblage of herbal stalks reminiscent of the Dionysian

thyrsus, ostensibly a symbol of strength through unity, although not devoid of a basic botanical significance, barsom is derived etymologically from the Sanskrit *barhis*, "the sacrificial herb," from *brhati*, "he plucks."

The red tassel, like another mushroom cap, situated above the fasces also is an important Masonic symbol for the mystic tie that binds Masons, although they might be of diverse opinion and perspective into a sacred band of friends and brothers. The knot or tie, however, is a more ancient symbol of cosmic trans-terrestrial union and reminiscent of the basic meaning of Mithras's name as the "uniter."

Together the cap and spear form a remarkable homologue of the *Amanita* mushroom. Unlike the Mithraic versions of the Sword of Accord, the various *Déclarations*, with both the inclusion of color as well as other revealing details, leave little room for doubt as to exactly what entheobotanical Mystery is being depicted. Thus, the skirtlike remnant of the mushroom's shattered universal veil hanging down atop the spearhead is explicitly depicted, as well as its otherwise incongruously bulbous base.

The French Declaration of the Rights of Man. *(See color figures 9 and 10, p. 100.)*

For additional clarification, the upwardly thrusting mushroom is identified with a sacred garland of evergreen boughs, and its base remains concealed, albeit just barely, beneath the illuminated capstone of the *Déclaration*, so that it is actually bursting into birth from the rock. The evergreen (usually the Attic acacia) is a well-known Masonic symbol derived from ancient sources whose esoteric mythos is intimately connected to the obligatory mycorrhizal relationship between evergreen trees and the entheogenic mushroom that they host. One might only expect the fly agaric to emerge, as it is about to do in this image, amidst an evergreen-strewn forest floor.

A final element is added to make the esoteric intention of the scene obvious. Even the most profanely minded viewer would have recognized the *ouroboros* as the preeminent symbol of the Hermetic Mysteries. For initiates, however, the circular serpent represents far more specific and practical truths. Aside from the well-known association of snakes and mushrooms, and the probable allusion to the wheel-like circular cap (notice the serpent's lowermost extremity corresponds exactly with the bottom of the Phrygian cap), there is an additional reference to the widely documented practice of filtering and fortifying the entheogenic properties of the mushroom as the urinous metabolite by means of passing it through the human body. Thus with the *ouroboros*—the "tail-eater," more correctly translated as "urine-eater"[27]—the cycle of the Mystery comes full circle in this masterwork of esoteric visual deception.

Capping the scene, *Libertas* on the left, wearing the liberty cap, receives Divine Illumination, while on the right the angel of Reason makes eye contact with the viewer and beckons attention to the revelatory light of the disembodied pyramidal eye with her right hand and its as yet unrevealed earthly source with her left, the alchemical Son of the Sun, the sacred mushroom sacrament of the Sword of the Accord.

The fact that other renderings of the *Déclaration* are practically identical even in the subtle details described above argues conclusively against the possibility that coincidence or artistic license played any significant part in the composition of these illuminated manuscripts. Quite the contrary, such consistency is the product of an intentional, detailed design that carefully incorporates a complex set of secret fungal-entheogenic images worthy of the Mysteries from which they were derived.

Liberty Pole, Republic of Mainz. *Watercolor, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1793.*

Liberty Pole

Liberty poles were tall staffs of one kind or another with a Phrygian cap or other symbol of liberty on the top. This was given a Greek name as *eleuthriodendron* (*eleutherios*, "free," *dendron*, "tree,"[28] the Tree of Liberty that was a "post or tree set up by the populace, hung with flags and devices and crowned with a cap of liberty." Such trees were planted during the American Revolution, and in France in the 1790s following the French Revolution, and so also in Italy. Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, upon awakening from his long, mushroom-induced slumber,[29] is surprised to notice in his newly post-revolutionary village a "tall naked pole, with something on it that looked like a red nightcap." The nightcap, first recorded in the fourteenth century as the bed attire, also denotes the sleeping draught as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century and has displaced the former as its primacy meaning today, connoting the liminal state of dreaming. The nightcap is also the name of an edible mushroom, translated from the Finnish (*Rozites caperata*), known also as Gypsy Nitecap, and in Sweden as Granny's Nitecap.[30]

Like the maypole granting sexual license on May Day (the folk equivalent to the Roman Floralia festival), Liberty Trees should also be understood as phallic symbols.[31] The liberty pole, complete with Phrygian cap, also occurred on some early American coinage, and the goddess Libertas, along with her spear and wearing the cap, almost became the central image on the Great Seal of the United States.

Liberty Cap

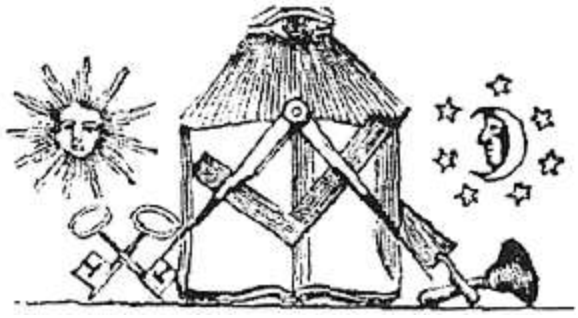
Identical to the Mithraic Phrygian version, and sometimes called by that name, the liberty cap is a brimless cloth cap that fits snugly around the head. There was a Temple of *Libertas* on Rome's Aventine Hill, built during the second Punic War, and a statue of her was set up on the site of Cicero's house after it was demolished. She was customarily depicted with both the cap and the pole, and emancipated slaves wore her cap, called the pileus, as an emblem of freedom. Hence, French and American revolutionaries used it as a symbol of liberty. Although most often red (as were those worn by the French Jacobins), the English wore a blue cap with a white border with the same connotation, and Britannia sometimes carries such a cap on the point of her spear. The bronze statue that ever since 1863 has stood atop the United States Capitol building was originally intended by its sculptor Thomas Crawford to represent Liberty, but she appears without her Phrygian cap since it was deemed improper for her to have ever been enslaved, and she instead is named Freedom Triumphant in War and Peace. Bartholdi's colossal Statue of Liberty which stands in New York harbor similarly lacks the cap, which is replaced by a Mithraic diadem with seven solar rays. The artist had the assistance of Gustav Eiffel in designing and constructing the structural framework. Both Bartholdi and Eiffel were Masonic brothers from the same Lodge, and their fellow brothers reviewed the project before it was presented to the US committee. The Grand Master of New York laid the cornerstone of the pedestal in 1884, so that the entire undertaking was a Masonic project.

On August 10 of 1793, when the French Convention enthroned the "Goddess of Reason," it resulted in the desecration of the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris. The municipal officers, national guards, and ballet girls carrying "truth" torches attended the procession. Even the Archbishop of Paris participated in the procession while nearly all the clergy removed their canonical costumes to don red nightcaps.

The Brotherhood of the Cincinnati

George Washington was himself initiated into Freemasonry in 1752 at the Lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and as is well known, he was a close

friend of Lafayette, who was a coinitiate and fought with him in the Revolution. The famous Masonic apron (one of two) was personally embroidered in silk by the Marquise de Lafayette and presented to him in 1784. Washington was also a Rosicrucian and a familiar of the group of mystics and occultists who met at the Wissahickon Creek in Philadelphia, among whom was Peter Miller, who translated the Declaration of Independence into European languages. It was there that the basic ideas of the US Constitution took shape. Washington was reputedly of a mystical bent himself and profoundly religious, and on several occasions he had visionary experiences in which he saw the future destiny of the emerging new nation. During the Revoltionary War most of Washington's generals were fellow Freemasons and he always entrusted matters of the greatest importance to members of the brotherhood.



Masonic rebus. *Reprinted in Stellar Theology, and Masonic Astronomy, Robert Hewitt Brown (San Diego, CA, Book Tree 2002, first published by D. Appleton and Co. 1882).*

> It is not difficult to imagine that groups of Freemasons, experiencing rituals and initiations in an altered state of awareness, might have gained special insight into the importance of the American revolutionary experience, and its meaning for humanity as a whole.[32]

Like the Mithraic brotherhood of warriors, the soldiers of the Revolutionary Army maintained a close comradeship, terming themselves the Cincinnati, on the model of the quasi-mythical simple Roman farmer who saved the Republic and its besieged army, Lucius Quinctius

Cincinnatus, born 519 BCE. Washington was their first president. The descendants of the original soldiers still meet today.

Masonic Alchemy

An intriguing drawing convincingly connects Masonic esoterica with the entheogenic sacrament.[33] Along with the alchemical Sun and Moon (with seven planetary stars), the crossed Keys of Heaven, the interlocked square and compass, and similarly crossed trowel and bell, we find, in the very center of the image, an unusual and at first unidentifiable object, like an optical illusion, perhaps a lantern, but once seen correctly, the truth jumps up from the page. It is a mushroom, closely resembling certain *Psilocybes* —among them the striated "Liberty Cap," *Psilocybe semilanceata*. The cap of the mushroom is presumably formed by the emanating from the all-seeing disembodied eye of Horus, a fact that does not explain the mushroom's stipe bisects the square and compass, growing upwards from a Book of Revelation and pouring from its pileus cap a stream of Living Waters down on either side.

In this context, it is important to note that the name "Liberty Cap" has been applied to *P. semilanceata*, a common and potent entheogenic mushroom, at least as early as 1841 in Europe, an appellation probably surfacing from a long-established and already common folkloric usage, going back to the time of the French Revolution.[34]

In view of the correspondences to Mithraic iconography and the characteristically alchemical nature of Masonic symbolism, as well as their famous antagonism with the Catholic Church on the subject of sacraments, and more recently reinforced by its opposition to the Masons' radical advocacy of the separation of Church and State, it is probable that the Mystery of the Mithraic sacrament was preserved within the Order. In fact, a characteristic memento of initiation into Freemasonry was the Masonic pitcher, presumably a token from the ceremony of a sacramental potion. Hence, there should be little doubt that something at some time was drunk in the ritual.

In his famous opus *Les grands Initiés*, Édouard Schuré describes the Eleusinian Mystery where "when the initiates passed through the mystic gate, the suitable priest threw on burning coals a narcotic liquid, which

produced perfumed fumes, not easily to be dissolved….” This alone is interest ing enough, but in Schuré’s context it becomes more sensational, Schuré supposedly derived his understanding of Eleusis from his experiences and initiations as a Freemason.[35]

After having published the above evidences of entheogen use among Freemasons,[36] a confidential informant,[37] a Master Mason with further Masonic esoteric training whom we will call “John,” has come forward to confirm our hypothesis and offer additional insights.

John tells us that a “fumigation ritual” consistent with that described by Schuré above does indeed still takes place, albeit rarely, in some Masonic circles outside of the Blue Lodge. John, who was so initiated, describes the rite as taking place in a very small enclosed chamber—and that it induces a profound altered state of consciousness in preparation for additional stages of the initiation.

He also revealed to us that there are other occasions where psychoactive compounds are traditionally employed by the more esoterically inclined Masons, and that such use is considered by them to be consistent with the ancient usages and a genuine form of Masonic practice. According to John, these practices are all but unknown within Blue Lodge Masonry, except by those few members who have sought out the esoteric roots of the tradition having advanced their Masonic education beyond the confines of the modern Blue Lodge. He stresses that the use of entheogens in Masonry, while practiced among a rarified and enlightened few, is rare.

Of course the general membership can vary from the more or less esoteric. John tells us that entheogenic practices are more common among initiates of some older military Lodges who often recognize their Mithraic roots, and in the Lodges of France where co-Masonry has flourished and esotericism became *en vogue*. But this is a topic for further research.

Finally, we would like to direct the reader’s attention to a founding myth of Masonry in which the murdered body of Hiram Abiff, a Master Mason and Master of Works on Solomon’s Temple, was “raised” from his resting place beneath an acacia sprig which marked the spot to those who would be sent by King Solomon to search. After the interred corpse of Hiram was found, Solomon himself went to the site to recover the body. Feeling beneath the ground at the site of the acacia, the king felt Hiram’s “hand.” In the process of recovering his corpse, he first used the grip of the

Entered Apprentice, then that of the Fellowcraft, but twice felt the skin slipping off Hiram's hand. Finally Solomon used the grip of the Master Mason to raise the corpse.[38]

In the entheobotanical context, we feel that this myth is a description of a ritualized acacia harvest. We note that the subterranean root bark of acacia and mimosa species are known to contain high levels of Dimethyltriptamine, an entheogen which is strongly psychoactive when extracted and inhaled, and which is easily combined with other sacred entheogenic plants, and consumed as a potion.

Envoi

Two of us were in Greece recently to launch the publication of Modern Greek translations of several of the books that helped lay some of the foundation for the present study. There was a formal reception at the prestigious Benaki Museum in Athens and a daylong celebration by our publisher in the village of Eleusis, culminating in a private tour of the ancient sanctuary by the archaeologist now in charge of the excavations. An old friend from decades ago drove us back to Athens, and, despite the lateness of the hour, we climbed the Hill of the Pnynx where Athenians used to gather for the Assembly that was their experiment in a new form of government—democracy. We sat in silent meditation upon the magnificent ruins of the sacred buildings on the nearby Acropolis.

After our the presentation at the Benaki, our friend held a banquet for us in his restored neoclassical mansion in the old Plaka, on the northern slope of the Acropolis.

"You know," he said, "I read what you write. You were not supposed to say that." I knew that I had betrayed a confidence, but I replied, "It doesn't matter, does it? Nobody will believe it anyway." Although tourists to Eleusis can now buy our account of the events of the holy ceremony, it rarely finds its way into the syllabus of a university course. I will not mention which of many indiscretions was the subject of his reproach.

A subject we treat briefly—and with an eye to continuing research—is the impact of Mithraism (and related cultic religions) upon Freemasonry and Hermeticism, which both drew heavily upon the esoteric Mysteries. The seeds for such researches, like the impetus for that of our focus on Mithraism, often came from accidental encounters with mythogems and imagery that were so suggestive of entheogenic inspiration so as to demand further study. In the case of Mithraism, we found it very curious that, like an *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, Mithras was said to be born wearing a red, star-spotted cap, from a pinecone or (philosopher's?) stone. A few hours in libraries, in turn, uncovered several of the most important and convincing evidentiary artifacts presented above. The importance of having

“eyes to see” the sacred and esoteric iconography cannot be underestimated since little otherwise remains of the Mithraic material culture.

Thus, we are not initiates betraying secrets given to us in confidence but researchers who have stumbled upon what we think is compelling evidence for a “drug cult” remarkably well placed at the fountainhead of our civilization.

Secrets are secrets, and they lose their sanctity when revealed. Fortunately, they are usually incomprehensible to those who do not already know them. The messenger who describes the miraculous end of the hero Oedipus in Sophocles’s ancient tragedy concludes his account by saying that if you don’t understand what he just said, he’d rather be speaking to someone else.

Albert Hofmann’s discovery of LSD in 1943 was not seen to be part of the psychedelic revolution until R. Gordon Wasson’s *Life* magazine article of May 13, 1957 publicized his experience taking entheogenic mushrooms with the Mazatec shaman María Sabina. Subsequently, hordes of seekers journeyed to her remote village of Huatla de Jiménez in Oaxaca, Mexico, and she came to lament that ever since the gringos arrived “the little saints” (her term for the mushrooms) had lost their voice; they were no longer of use.

Nevertheless, when asked to write a preface for the latest version of our work together, even if it be only a sentence, Albert supplied: “Today the world needs Eleusis more than ever before.”

Despite widespread prohibition and perhaps even the possible connivance of those who already know the secrets, people have turned again to entheogens in the hopes of reviving the Mysteries. New, highly monitored experiments are being conducted in scientific laboratories to test the potential of the forbidden sacraments, and shamanic-tourism has emerged, offering a range of opportunities, with varying ethnological authenticity, to share initiations with surviving indigenous cultures or in the context of neo-shamanic revivalism. Among other therapeutic consequences, these proscribed entheogenic rites may even hold a key to treating the devastating plague of chemical addiction.

Religions are always an adaptive assimilation of their displaced precedents, some more obviously than others. Numerous sects, many of them Christian, have sought and attained legal sanction for their

entheogenic sacraments, which, in the United States, can be protected either by the Constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion or the Congressionally mandated Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. Although the former had a somewhat different intention originally, it now recognizes the diverse ethnicities of our nation. The latter takes cognizance of the cultures that were destroyed or suppressed by the European conquest of the New World. Still to be resolved is the question of what constitutes a religion. Can new prophets arise, and how many people does it take to qualify as a congregation? Can there be a religion of one, or does that define a philosophy? The Canadian constitution, which is more liberal and modern than that of the US, guarantees freedom of thought, including whatever might be integral to stimulating such thought.

This is the contemporary scenario for the events we have chronicled in the spread of a Persian solar cult through the Middle and Near East into Old Europe. Our subtitle is in some sense facetious, since Europe was quite well civilized before its dominance by the Roman Empire. The males of the bureaucracy, and the army that sustained their grip on power, maintained the suppression. Their conversion to Christianity substituted a new socio-political leadership and assimilated the religio-political tenets of their deposed predecessors. The process was merely the latest stage in the spread of Zoroastrianism that centuries before had already influenced the evolution of the Judaic-Egyptian concept of monotheism and was soon to surface again in the proclamations of its latest prophet Muhammad. Christianity quickly assumed much of the material culture and ideological tenets of Roman Mithraism. Thus, arguably, the new Christian cult could be considered a reformed version of its Mithraic precursor.

All of this, of course, sounds strange since there were always secrets reserved only for the elect and elite, being often strenuously denied and even persecuted among the profane. They persisted both in the clerical hierarchy, its political designees, and especially among the societies that sought to revive the ancient Mysteries, and in the evolving sciences that sought to harness the secrets of the natural world. Many are called, but few are chosen. Only some are admitted to the innermost sanctum of knowledge.

The Last Supper commemorated the Tree of Knowledge and the First Supper that was created from it. Despite the Last, there can still be a Next

Supper, one which samples its fruit with the potential to explore further dimensions of the human spirit previously known only in the traditions of myth. Like the First and all that have followed it, the Next Supper will be a humbling and awe-inspiring glimpse through the veil of the mundane world into that of the Cosmic Perfection that lies behind and beneath. These flights into the ideal will continue to define and inspire the realms of human possibility, stretching our grasp into the preternatural with the hope of incorporating the powerful insights experienced into the all-too-human social, political, and ethical institutions that have come to define civilization. Such is the basis of the hero's shamanic journey.

Thus, the pinnacle of human achievement—and human civilization—dwells, as Plato holds, not in the material world and its manifestations, but in access to the eternal, archetypal dimension of ideas.

Entheogens will always help to make us more human, to step outside our immediate and primordial responses to realize a "higher" good—that of the collective striving beyond itself in a manner consistent perhaps with the ecology of an intelligent cosmos, defined, as humanity is, not by the individuality of its parts, but by the interconnectivity of the whole.

The reliable access entheogens afford to this realm is matched only by the impracticality of predicting or rationally analyzing the insight they bring up from the depths of the human unconscious. The very complexity of the human condition, the sophistication of the questions at hand, and the inspiration needed to address such grand philosophical problems—all seem to demand something more than the linear reasoning that defines rational problem solving. Indeed, and perhaps especially, the Classical Greeks realized the limitations of uninspired reason, and thus paid special tribute to the chthonic, mysterious attributes of even their most reasonable gods, and celebrated ecstatic flights with an infamous zeal. New research on this academically taboo subject continues to enrich our understanding of the importance of the so-called irrational, and the role of entheogens in the ancient Western civilization. What the Greeks embraced, the Christian ethic denied and condemned, setting the scene for a struggle that led even to the rejection of the present world in expectation of a better one after death.

What better a hope has humanity than to tear asunder our preconceptions and psychological obstacles to bear witness more clearly and objectively to our present folly, and to more fully realize our best hopes

for a more “civilized” future? How better to elicit creative solutions to the ever present Hegelian dialectic that characterizes the enchanting human spectacle?

Have we, as some have speculated, entered an age of such profound need for a widespread entheogenic revival that it outweighs the value of the archaic—perhaps obsolete—demand for secrecy?

Or are perhaps entheogens finally becoming democratized and more free to foster human evolution unencumbered from the controls previously exercised by socio-political special interests?

On the other hand, perhaps secrets are intended to be revealed when the time is ripe—that is, when once formative, even venerable, traditions have lost their immediacy and relevance, and they become artifacts of a historic progression whose meaning is only important in the context of contemporary interpretation. Thus, we offer no apology for the presentation of whatever secrets might have been revealed in the pages above, but we send forth the present work with the humble hope that it elucidates a few sparks of the ancient Mithraic splendor that infused so much of the fledging civilization of the West.

Appendix

The *Mirgia* Mushroom Among the Mithraic Yezidi

Siamak Ashoori is a Kurdish ethnic Yezidi (Yazidi), an academic with a background in linguistics, who lives in the United States. Following an introduction by a southern California publisher, he graciously agreed to multiple interviews on the subject of Kurdish Mithraism and the magical plant known as *mirgia* in Kurdish and as *mehrgiah* in Farsi—literally "the plant of Mithra." The material in this appendix is derived from these interviews as recorded in 2001, and is presented here as a means to further research. We thank him for his cooperation and generosity, and for reviewing the accuracy of the cursory treatment presented below.

The Kurds have long been marginalized by the dominant Muslim culture, and thus their traditions have gone largely under-recorded. This is unfortunate for Mithraic research and scholarship since the Zagros region preserves very ancient Persian traditions.

The Yezidis, although influenced by later events, preserve a very ancient version of Mithraism predating the Zoroastrian Reformation. Theirs is not a tradition recycled back from the Roman Empire, although they share with Roman Mithraism certain elements, such as an uncanny parallel of initiatory grades,[1] the sacred clay pellets or "pearls" received as tokens of initiation, and their sanctuary caves and subterranean shrines with sources of water.[2] An ethnographer at the beginning of the nineteenth century recorded that the Yezidi religion bore a certain fundamental resemblance to the shamanism of certain Altaian tribes of Siberia.[3] His father's side of the family emigrated in more recent times from among the Kurdish population of Syria.

Siamak's paternal grandmother, however, was a Mithraist who died at a very advanced age, perhaps 112, and who had always lived in the central

Zagros Mountains near Kermanshah in the western part of modern Iran, about seventy miles from the country's border with Iraq. The area was first settled between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago. Today, the majority of the population is Shi'a Muslim, but there is some diversity.

Upon inquiring on the nature of the famous *mirgia* plant and the sacred ritual libation made from it, Siamak's grandmother told him that it was "made from a type of mushroom." During the many picnics and camping trips his family made to the forest, he collected mushrooms with his grandmother, including a large variety that she considered a "holy poison." He remembers the mushrooms as being red and yellowish ("the colors of the sun") and having white spots. The mushrooms were kept dried in a closet and not in the kitchen. He was warned that he should not touch them because they were a "holy thing," and that he should not touch them when unsupervised by this grandmother. His parents warned that if he ate them he might die.

Eventually, the mushrooms would disappear from their storage place, although he never witnessed what was done with them. He did note, however, that the disappearance coincided with the preparation of the sacramental Yezidi wine described below.

Siamak witnessed interesting aspects of modern Kurdish Mithra worship. On Sundays, about twenty men and women (specifically couples) dressed in all-white garments met on rooftops in the early afternoon with musical instruments. There they drank the sacramental wine, which was specifically designated "home-made."

"This is not like normal wine," said Siamak. "You drink a little bit and you feel like you can fly."

They would sing, chant, and pray to the Sun for about six hours through the midday (from about 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). As a child, he briefly witnessed one of these gatherings, before being ushered away by the participating adults.

He reports that this sacred wine was also taken in small amounts at dawn, as the Mithraists welcomed the return of the Sun, and in greater amounts during the aforementioned rooftop revels. The term "rooftop" was informally assigned to this ritual by its participants, which not only described the practical setting, but distinguishes it as a private gathering—

one that is semiprohibited in mainstream Islam. This wine was also was consumed at the "ceremony of the dead dance," which is a funerary rite.

Siamak was in his early forties when interviewed in 2001 and he was informed or witnessed all this when he was approximately seven years old. He tells us that these gatherings, which are not sanctioned by Islam, are practiced (as far as he knows) by at least two or three Yezidi tribes in the area, and they are considered "pagan," "occult," and "orgiastic" by the dominant Muslim religion. As a child, Siamak never understood why everything was secret. Insofar as it is believed that these traditionalists worship the Sun in their largely "pagan" religion, critics allege that they worship the "root of Satan" or the "angel of fire."

In contrast, the similar Kurdish Muslim celebrations, where participants dance in wide circles, are not secret. These are Sufi rites, which are predominantly a syncretism of Mithraic traditions. They are Ahle-Haq Sufis or the "People of Truth," who sing the same refrain as the Yezidi, *"Lelele, Rojaan"* ("Let's go! Play it!"), minus the utterance of *"Rojaan";* and they are equally ecstatic. Like the Yezidi, they worship the rooster (the Persian bird who announces the rising of the Sun); and the tambour and similar instruments are considered holy. Siamak's maternal uncle was an Ahle-Haq. The Ahle-Haq are well aware of their Kurdish roots, and mainstream Islam generally frowns on them.

The term "Yezidi" seems to designate them as a people who have experienced an epiphany. Thus Siamak's grandmother told him that he should become a devotee of Mithra so that he would receive the revelations that might follow.

She told him that she and her "circle" also knew that the *haoma* plant sprouts from where Mithra's sweat falls on the ground, and she would anoint or bless herself with grape leaves since their essence similarly contained the "sweat of Mithras."

Siamak also witnessed the preparation of an opium wine, which was usually done by women, and sometimes they added a little "poison," which he felt was derived from the *mirgia* mushroom.

Notes

Chapter One

1. Portions of this book have previously been published as: Mark Alwin Hoffman, Carl A. P. Ruck, and Blaise Daniel Staples, "The Entheogenic Eucharist of Mithras," *Entheos: Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, vol. 2, no. 1 (summer 2002); Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, "The Brotherhood of the Warriors of Mithras," *New England Classical Journal*, vol. 31.3 (August 2004); Carl A. P. Ruck, "Mithraism: The Drug Cult that Civilized Europe," *Altrove* (Società Italiana per lo Studio degli Stati di Concienza, SISSC), 2008.
2. If women were ever admitted, it was certainly a rarity. Porphyry in his essay on abstinence from eating meat (*De abstinentia esu animalium*, 4.16) claims that the male Mithraists were called "lions" and the females "hyenas." Hyena is nowhere else mentioned as a grade of initiation. The Greek *hyaina* may be a textual corruption of *leaina* or "lioness." The "Lion" is a Mithraic grade. Two finely decorated sepulchral chambers in the town of Guigariche (ancient Oea) near Tripoli contain the sarcophagi of a man and his wife, Aelius Magnus and Aelia Arisuth, labeling them as Lion and Lioness. On the wall beside the niche containing the man's remains is a striding candle-bearer; such a figure is depicted also in the procession of Lionsin the Santa Prisca Mithraeum. Perhaps Aelia Arisuth was labeled a Lioness solely by virtue of her marriage to the Lion. Tertullian (De *monogamia*, 17) records that highest orders were allowed to marry only once, as was also prescribed for the Magi. He also claims that they denied themselves sex in honor of the god. Thus two fourth-century inscriptions found in the Vatican record: 1) that the man Kamenius had achieved the highest order of "Father of Fathers," and 2) a poem by his wife grieving, along with her children, for the "loss from her chaste marriage-bed." Obviously the chastity was something imposed only later as the husband rose in the ranks. See M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), originally *Mithras de geheimzinnige God* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1959).

   The so-called "Mithras Liturgy" (part of Parisian codex Papyrus 574 in the Bibliotèque Nationale, a collection of magical spells from Egypt, dated to the fourth-century CE but containing material at least several hundred years earlier, comprised of lines 475–834) has been recently adduced as evidence of female participation in the cult of Mithras, in that the magician seems to be passing the rite on to a daughter: "Be gracious to me, O Providence and Psyche, as I write these mysteries handed down for gain *[sic]* but for instruction; and for an only child I request immortality" Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, John Dominic Crossan, eds., *The Historical Jesus in Context*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). The magician is instructing the daughter how to attain immortality by reciting a spell and breathing in the rays of the sun. Despite the appellation of daughter, however, the recipient is consistently in the masculine, which may mean that the writer is reusing a text originally written for men. See Morton Smith and Shaye F. D. Cohen, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh: New Testament, Early Christianity, and Magic* (Leiden, Brill, 1996), 127. This may indicate a new development in Mithraism as conducted in Egypt. It is also possible that the "daughter" is metaphoric. See Hans-Dieter Betz, *The Mithras Liturgy: Text Translation and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 2005), 96–97.
3. Pliny, *Natural History* 30.6. *Magus ad eum Tiridates venerat … magos secum adduxerat, magicis etiam cenis eum initiaverat; non tamen … hanc ab eo artem accipere valuit*.
4. Suetonius, *Life of Octavian Caesar Augustus*, 248.
5. D. K. Malloch, *Christ and the Taurobolium: Lord Mithras in the Genesis of Christianity* (Lochan, Scotland: Lochan Press, 2006), 141 *et seq*.
6. Ibid., 175 *et seq*.

7. Ibid., 268 *et seq*. See also Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the Original Jesus a Pagan God?* (London: Thorsons/Haper Collins, 1999), 199. Paul's supposed friendship with the Stoic philosopher and writer Seneca and his conversion of him to Christianity, however, is based on a fourth-century forgery of an exchange of letters between the saint and the Latin author, who was Nero's tutor and advisor and a probable Mithraist, originally from Tarsus. Seneca was accepted as a Christian by Jerome, who listed him as one of the Church fathers and coupled the suicide of Seneca with the fabled martydom of Peter and Paul, which took place about the same time. As early as the third century, Tertullian considered Seneca's ideas as very similar, at least, to Christianity.
8. British Museum.
9. Lampridius, *Commodi vita*.
10. Fifth-century Byzantine historian Socrates, amplified by Sozomen (Salaminus Hermias Sozomens); the *History* was a continuation of Eusebius.
11. Malloch, *Christ and the Taurobolium*, 688–739.
12. On the psychoactive nature of the early Christian sacrament, see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000).
13. MacCoby, *Paul and Hellenism* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 123–36.
14. Occasionally they were larger, as the one at Bad Deutsch-Altenberg (Austria), which measures about twenty-eight by seventy-four feet.
15. V 481–483. Items listed with V numbers refer to M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956).
16. In the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, the occasion is the Passover meal, but the traditional order of eating for that celebration is first wine, followed by food; the order is reversed in the Gospels, with bread first as the body of Jesus. Its cultic significance is obvious also in the drinking of the wine as blood, which would be repulsive to Jews, whose kosher meat can be eaten only after it is drained of all blood.
17. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 6.1. On Epimenides as a shaman, see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 15 *et seq*.
18. See J. P. Kane, "The Mithraic cult meal in its Greek and Roman environment," in J. R. Hinnells (ed.), *Mithraic Studies*, vol. 2 (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1975).

Chapter Two

1. The symbolic orientation of a Mithraeum, which did not always correspond to its actual geographical orientation, was with the tauroctony in its "western" niche and the entrance opposite to face the rising sun in the "east."
2. The terra-cotta votive in the Archaeological Museum of Odessa presents the tauroctony with the slaughterer looking at the bull, but this is probably not Mithras, but Attis; see Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterien* (München: C. H. Beck, 1990), 163–4. Mithras was often assimilated to other Graeco-Roman gods and Christ. Other versions of Mithras looking at the bull are incorrect restorations although there may be a few exceptions: i.e., a coin from Tarsus, minted in the reign of Gordian III, where Mithras clearly looks at his prey (Vermaseren, fig. 3; so also V 230, a large marble statue from the Ostia Mithraeum built into the foundations of the Therms of Trajan; V 208, statue probably from Velitrae; V 11, 12, terracotta tablets from Asia Minor. The tauroctony is generally recognized as a version of the scene depicted on a first-century Italian terra-cotta relief where the goddess of Victory, *Nike*, kneels on the back of a bull as she slaughters it but looks directly at it. The averted gaze, however, is probably the more significant element, allowing comparison with the Greek hero Perseus, who always looks away from the Gorgon Medusa as he harvests her head.
3. The Greek *soma* meaning "body" is not the same word, but inevitably Hellenized Jews would interpret it as such.
4. R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968); Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995, reprinted as *Magic Mushrooms in Religion and Alchemy*, Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2002); Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000); Peter L. Wilson, *Ploughing the Clouds: The Search for Irish Soma* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1999).
5. Jonathan Ott, "The Post-Wasson History of the Soma Plant," *Eleusis*, no. 1 (1998). Jan E. M. Houben, "The Soma-Haoma Problem," *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, vol. 9, issue 1c (May 2003): cannabis and ephedra residue has been detected in vessels employed in the Soma ritual from the Gonur sanctuary in the Bactrian-Margiana archaeological site in Turkmenistan dating from the second millennium.

   The Wasson identification is rejected by D. S. Flattery and M. Swartz, *Haoma and Harmaline*, Near Eastern Studies volume 21 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989). The authors do away with Wasson's evidence, dismissing the mountain habitat of the plant as perhaps just an indication of "its lofty origin," and the lack of any mention of its leaves, flower, or roots, by suggesting that the Vedas often don't mention things! Nor is *Peganum harmala* (Syrian rue) common in India. Nor, as Ott points out, does it have the appropriate visionary effect: "As my recent self-experiments with *ayahuasca* and *harmel* pharmacology indicate, both *P. harmala* and plain *ayahuasca* potions are sedatives with scant visionary properties" (p. 18). *Ayahuasca* must be ingested with *Psychotria viridis* or some other agent to access the psychoactive component. For a more detailed response to proponents of *P. harmala*, see Jonathan Ott, *Pharmacotheon* (Kennewick, WA: Natural Products, 1993, 1996), chap. 6, especially note 11, 344–348.

   Additional evidence is found in the Wasson Archives, Botanical Libraries, Harvard, letter to Professor W. B. Henning, 6-13-66: In the Persian text known as the *Shahnameh* (lines 3432–3568) there is a story of a physician who is granted permission by his king to seek out the herb (*giya'*) of immortality. J. C. Coyajee (*Cults and Legends of Ancient Iran and China*, Bombay: J. Karani's sons, 1936) translates *giya* as "fungus." This translation is supported by the fact that the

Sanskrit word *trna*, as well as the Chinese *chih*, includes all small plants and mushrooms. In the only Iranian version of this story we have, that of Firdousi, the herb is scattered over a corpse, reviving it. (This myth is most likely related to a very similar, but better-known Chinese story that features the application of the magic herb to dead warriors on the battlefield—with similar results. The herb of the Chinese version of this story [according to its teller, the venerable Ssuma Ch'ien, father of Chinese historiography, d. 90 BCE] is the *ling chih*, the divine mushroom of immortality, giving additional support to the identification of the herb with fungi.) The physician sets off for northwest India, what is today northwest Pakistan, and with the help of local Brahmans looks for the herb among the mountains. The fact that they look for the herb "on the mountaintops" strongly suggests association with Soma. The fact that the Brahmans were the stewards of the Soma is also strongly suggestive. Also the color of the plant (c. line 3443) is described as "shimmering like Byzantine silk," using terms like *raxs*, and *roumi parand* that strengthen the herb's connection to the Soma plant. *Raxs* is linked etymologically with the place name Ruxj, probably the modern Mt. Herat of Afghanistan, originally named Hari, which is the most common descriptive term for the Soma plant in the *Rig Veda*.

The enigma of the whole story for Wasson is why Firdousi, the recorder of this tale, seemed to ignore the *haoma* of his homeland. This is a very good question.

We speculate that he must certainly have known of the tradition, but that he probably recognized (by whatever means) that surrogates for the original Herb of Immortality were already being used in his time and that he was transmitting the Vedic-based tradition of the *hari* Soma-herb in the context of retelling the Sino-Iranian myth of resuscitation from the dead. Do not the geographic and morphological details perhaps betray a deeper understanding of the existence and perhaps even identity of the Brahmans' sacred herb, this "Herb of Immortality?" For a more detailed discussion of the traditions concerning "India" and its entheobotany, see Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 151–58. It is also probable that it was unnecessary to make any explicit statement connecting this herb to *haoma*—it would have gone without saying. The association of *haoma* with immortality is explicit in the Persian sacred texts, and there would have been little reason for him to venture into the sacred (and potentially dangerous) arena of the organized haoma-Mithraic priesthood.

6. See the discussion of Ixion, Perseus, and Jason in Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*. Ruck first investigated the theme of the ethnobotanical referents in the myths of the shaman-hero in "On the Sacred Names of Iamos and Ion: Ethnobotanical Referents in the Hero's Parentage," in *Classical Journal*, vol. 71, no. 3 (1976).
7. For a discussion of Euripides's tragedy and the words of the prophet, see Ruck, "The Wild and the Cultivated: Wine in Euripides' *Bacchae*," in R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrish, Jonathan Ott, Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).
8. *Rig Veda* IX.82.1; IX.97.13.
9. Ibid., IX,108.16
10. Yasht X.6.
11. Robert Bedrosian, "*Soma* among the Armenians," available on the web.
12. *Khwarshed Niyayesh (Sun Litany*), 15; *Mihr Niyayesh (Litany to Mithra*), 10; et cetera.
13. *Rig Veda*, LX.
14. Jonathan Ott, "Carved 'Disembodied Eyes' of Teotihuacián," in Wasson *et al., Persephone's Quest*, 141–148.
15. On the fungal significance of Argos and myth of the cow-maiden Io, see *The Apples of Apollo* 53 *et seq*.

16. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), 17–18, originally *Mithras de geheimzinnige God*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1959), citing F. Lommel, *Der Mithra Mythus*, Bonn, 1920.

    We have chosen to capitalize Soma-*haoma* to emphasize that it is a deity as well as the plant and entheogen.
17. Clay tablet found in the palace archives of Boghazköy in northern Anatolia.
18. See OED.
19. Exodus 39. 27.
20. On thrones of empowerment, see Mark Hoffman, Carl A. P. Ruck, and Blaise Daniel Staples, "Conjuring Eden: Art and the Entheogenic Vision of Paradise," *Entheos*, vol. 1, no. 1 (summer 2001).
21. H. W. Bailey, "The Second Stratum of the Indo-Iranian Gods" in *Mithraic Studies*, John R. Hinnels, ed., vol. 1, First International Conference, Manchester, 1971, Manchester University Press: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 16.
22. See chapters five and six.
23. See chapter eleven.
24. See chapter eight.
25. V 498: the date is November 20, CE 202.
26. V 485.
27. Firmicus Maternus (ca. 350 CE), *De errore profanarum religionum:* 5. 2.
28. William Malandra, *Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1983), 150–51.
29. Wendy Doniger, "Somatic Memories of R. Gordon Wasson," in *The Sacred Mushroom Seeker: Essays for R. Gordon Wasson*, Thomas J. Reidlinger, ed., (Portland, OR: Dioscorides Press, 1990), 58.
30. Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 8.
31. Carl A. P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess: Secrets of Eleusis* (Oakland, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2006); R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A. P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, reprinted and enlarged, twentieth-anniversary edition, Los Angeles: Hermes Press, 1998; thirtieth enlarged anniversary edition, Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Books, 2008).

    Wasson, R. Gordon, Stella Kramrish, Jonathan Ott, Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1992).
32. On the berserkers and the mushroom cult, see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), chap. XI: "Familiar Foods," 275 *et seq*.
33. Daniel E. Gershenson, *Apollo the Wolf God* (McLean, VI: *A Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph*, number 8, 1991), 84.
34. Athenaeus 10.45.
35. H. W. Bailey, *Mithraic Studies*, 19. Wasson consulted the renowned linguist on this problem of etymology.
36. I. Tóth, "Das lokale System der mithraischen Personifikationen in Gebiet von Poetovio," *Arheoloski Vestnik*, vol. 28 (1977) 385–392.
37. Epiphanius of Salamis (310–403) explicitly claims that Christ was born on the eighth day before the Ides of January, thirteen days after the winter solstice and the increase of the light, a date now celebrated as Epiphany (*Panarion* or "Medicine Chest,") 51.22.3 *et seq*.,Dindorf edition of

Leipzig, 1859, based on the early tenth-century Codex Marcianus; all previous editions are based on a severely censured and bowdlerized fourteenth-century manuscript. Jan Irvin called this citation to our attention: Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism: Christianity's Pagan Roots, a Revolutionary Reinterpretation of the Evidence* second edition (Grand Terrace, CA: Gnostic Media, 2009), 109–110. The number thirteen is given special significance as equally the number of disciples plus Jesus. Epiphanius, who incidentally took his name from the Epiphany (which he interprets as the Incarnation, or fleshy birth of the Savior), then goes on to explain that the "idolaters" guilefully celebrate this date with pagan worship in Rome as the Saturnalia and in Egypt with a rebirth of the Maiden, doing the same also in Petra among the Arabs.

The actual birth date is obviously mythical, since the Christians also celebrated it as the middle conjunction of the Sun and the Moon at the middle vernal equinox, which Clement of Alexandria recognized as the birth date, but Augustine (596 CE) tried to reconcile by claiming it as the date of the Incarnation, i.e., the Annunciation. The two dates are, furthermore, an assimilation of the Egyptian double birth of Horus, according to Plutarch, as the child at the winter solstice and the adult at the vernal equinox.

As late as the fourteenth century, Christian art depicted the Sun and the Moon on the Cross instead of the figure of the Man. The significance is obviously Mithraic and indicates the alchemical perpetuation of that religion's symbolism a millennium after the official Conversion.

38. Vermaseren, *Secret God*, 75, using the Latin term attested in inscriptions for the birthing miracle. For *Petra Genetrix Dei*, see V 1652, dedication on relief of the rock birth, from Aequinoctium, Vienna; V 1490, rock birth from Poetovio; V 1743, altar from Aquincum, Pannonia; V 1674, inscribed altar from Carnuntum, Pannonia; et cetera. For *Deus Genitor Rupe Natus*, see V 2007, tauroctony relief from Dostat; et cetera. For *Genitor Luminis*, see V 1676, inscribed altar from Carnuntum, Pannonia, et cetera.
39. Hesychios. See Leroy Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 200. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 125.
40. Genesis, 28.10 *et seq*. See Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 356 *et seq*.
41. John Marco Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 47, 230–31.
42. Stephen R. Berlant, "The Mysterious Ekron Goddess Revisited," *Journal of Ancient and Near Eastern Studies*, PDF format on the Web site.
43. Theophrastus, *Historia plantarum*, 4.7.2.
44. Ruck, "Mushrooms and Philosophers," Wasson et al., *Persephone's Quest* 151–177. On the perpetuation of the Shade-foots in Christian art, see Hoffman, et al., "Conjuring Eden," 36.
45. Cited in Thomas J. Riedlinger, "Fly-Agaric Motifs in the Cú Chulaind Myth Cycles," a lecture given at the Mycomedia Millennium Conference, October 29, 1999, as published on Erowid.org.
46. R. Gordon Wasson, "The Miskwedo of the Ahnishinaubeg," *Entheos*, vol. 1 no. 2 (winter) 2001 3–12.
47. Vermaseren, *Secret God*, 75.
48. See Hoffman et al., "Eden," note 113.
49. V 860.
50. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 70.
51. Thomas W. Doane, *Bible Myths and their Parallels in Other Religions* (originally published 1882; New York: University Books Inc., 1971; Mokelumne Hill, CA: Health Research, 1985).
52. V 733, *Deus Genetricis pro genitura Dei*, inscribed square base from Tridenum, Italy.
53. V 42, 5.
54. V 1088.

55. *Catholic Encyclopedia*. For more on muscaria-caps, see Mark Hoffman and Ursula Hoffman, "Erinnerungen an den Fliegenpilz," *Entheos*, vol. 1, no. 1 (summer 2001), 9–12.
56. Vermaseren, *Secret God*.
57. See Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 126 *et seq*.
58. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Technique of Ecstasy* (New York: Pantheon, 1964), 154.
59. See chapter eleven.
60. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 122 *et seq*.
61. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1964), 260.
62. On the association of mushrooms and the lightning bolt, see R. Gordon Wasson, "Lightningbolt and Mushroom": 83–94, in Wasson, et al., *Persephone's Quest*. See also Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, Cautopates p. 22: V 334; Cautes p. 41: V 694; Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 30, 94.
63. Wasson Archives, Persian file, Harvard Botanical Libraries.
64. See Ruck et al., *Apples of Appollo*, 30, 94.
65. Frag. 727 Nauck.
66. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 70 *et seq*., 178 *et seq*.
67. V 42, 4: the god rests on a wooded mountain, depicted as cloudlike little hills.
68. V 82, 83. Full image statues (approximately 3/4 meter high). Cautes stands with an axe in front of the bull in the Tauroctony from Dragu, V 1919, as he does in the Ghighen relief, V 2252; and axes often decorate Mithraic altars: V 1062, 1080, 1113, 1150, 1265.
69. V 894.
70. Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein: Hain, 1984), 100: Pinienzapfen.
71. V 1687: sandstone statue (85 × 53 × 39 cm) found near Reichel, Pannonia; the god emerges with tree behind him.
72. V 1240.
73. See Hoffman et al., "Eden," footnote 51. In the New World, what are called cedars are actually junipers.
74. In Ojibway, Miskwedo; see Wasson, "Miskwedo of the Ahnishinaubeg."
75. See Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*.
76. V 1247.
77. V 2306, from Moesia (Serbia): 47.5 × 56 cm.

Chapter Three

1. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, entry: “Mithraism.”
2. V 666.
3. V 1248, from Dieburg: the naked god, while emerging, stabs the rock with his dagger.
4. V 1584, Ptuj or Pettau (ancient Poetovia), Slovenia, ancient Dalmatia.
5. Manfred Clauss, *Mithras; Kult und Mysterien* (München: C.H. Beck, 1990), 80.
6. Augustine, *Homilies on John*, 1.7.
7. V 1765, found near Krempelmühle, Múzeum Budapest.
8. V 1368.
9. V 1369. The two were originally near the frieze that commemorated the banquet with Sol.
10. V 2170; found on the bank of the brook that runs through the town of Romula.
11. V 666, 72 × 43 cm., perhaps from Florence.
12. V 1667.
13. Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 129–30.
14. V 590: the salute is seen also in Minoan art. Compare the open palm salute: Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 190; V 40, relief from Dura-Europos: salute of the figure named as Barnaadath.
15. The procedure was banned by the EU in 1997 in the effort to prevent mad cow disease. Most winemakers now use clay-based fining agents.
16. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, vol. 1. 25.
17. V 165.
18. V 42, 4.
19. V 1083.
20. See Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum*, 13–14.
21. V 1283.10, framing episode from tauroctony, from Neuenheim; note the entirely different depiction of the celestial globe in episode 7 of the same relief, kneeling Mithras as Atlas. Compare V 1289, from Neuenheim, relief of Mithras *ephippos* (“mounted on horseback”), where the small globe in his hand is ovoid like a pinecone.
22. V 1027, from Colonia Agrippina, Germany. Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Köln.
23. On psychoactive additives to wine, see Carl A. P. Ruck and Blaise Daniel Staples, *The World of Classical Myth: Gods and Goddesses, Heroines and Heroes* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1994), chapter four.
24. V 1528.
25. V 1359, from Königshoffen.
26. V 1247A.
27. V 1765.
28. V 1368.
29. V 2171. 3–4, tauroctony relief in central register, with rock birth, with top and bottom registers; the Water Miracle is on the top register, described as “3) Mithras shooting at a rock against which a kneeling person holds his hands. 4) The bull in a small house.” No mention is made of the mushroom shape. The other two episodes on the top register, to the left, are Mithras taurophorus (“leading the bull”) and Mithras riding the bull.
30. Porphyrius, *De antro*, 5–6.
31. Porphyrius, *De antro*, 10.
32. Taufiq Wahby, *The Remnants of Mithraism in Hatra and Iraqui Kurdistan and its Traces in Yazidism* (London: T. Wahby, 1962).
33. *Book of the Dead*, chapter LXX1.

34. Clark Heinrich, *Strange Fruit: Alchemy and Religion, the Hidden Truth* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994, reprinted as *Magic Mushrooms: In Religion and Alchemy*, Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2002), 26.
35. Heinrich, *Strange Fruit*, 194. Additional *Amanita* "trip reports" are documented at http://www.erowid.org/experiences/subs/exp_Amanitas.shtml.
36. Homer, *Iliad* 16.779. Evening is referred to as the time Helios unyokes his bulls. Other later sources replace the bulls with a team of horses.
37. "Herakles and the Cauldron of the Sun": 256–268, in Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).

Chapter Four

1. Plutarch, *Themistocles*, 31; Diodoros, 11.58.
2. Thycidides, 1. 138.
3. John Marr, "The Death of Themistocles": 59-167, in *Greece and Rome*, 2nd series, vol. 42, no. 2 (October 1995). Thomas J. Haley and William O. Berndt, *Toxicology* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1987), 5. Paul Gemsege (July 1758), "Dissertation on a Poison of the Ancients Called Bull's Blood": 414 *et seq*, in *A Selection of Curious Articles from the Gentleman's Magazine* (John Walker (ed.) (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811). Cicero rejected the reputed toxicity (*Brutus*, 100–11).
4. Cornelius Nepos, *Themistocles*, 10: *Magnesiae morbo mortuum*.
5. Pliny, *Natural History*, 20, 23, 24; Nicander, *Alexipharmaca*, 330, 430, 527.
6. Plutarch, *Flamininus*, 20.
7. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 167.
8. Herodotus, 3.15.
9. Persius, *Satires* 1.121, Strabo, 1.2.21.
10. Patrick McGovern, "A Beverage for King Midas and at the Limits of the Civilized World": 279–297, in *Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
11. On the shamanic nature of such expeditions to the imaginary lands of the Hypoboreans, see Carl A. P. Ruck, "The Offerings from the Hyperboreans," R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrish, Jonathan Ott, Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).
12. Carl A. P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess: Secrets of Eleusis* (Oakland, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2006); R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A. P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 20–21, reprinted and enlarged, twentieth anniversary edition, Los Angeles: Hermes Press, 1998). For the Judaic occurrence of the ergot sacrament as manna and its continuation in Judeo-Christian traditions, see Dan Merkur, *The Mystery of Manna: The Psychedelic Sacrament of the Bible* (Rochester, VT: Park Street/Inner Traditions International, 2000). A broad survey of the use of the ergot potion in Persian, Greek, Jewish, and Islamic culture is presented in F. R. Dannaway, A. Piper, and P. Webster, "Bread of Heaven or Wines of Light: Entheogenic Legacies and Esoteric Cosmologies": 93–503, in *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 38, no. 4 (December 2006). Some Shia and Sufi writings are highly suggestive of a "celestial botany" that employed psychoactive plants for initiatory and ritual purposes.
13. The name of "ass ears" is given in Spanish to the comfrey, *Symphytum officinale L*., a plant mainly used for healing wounds, flowering from May to June. The resemblance to the ass's ear depends upon the shape of its leaves, with the purple flower clusters beneath them suggesting the coloration of the inner ear. See Pio Font Quer, *Plantas Medcinales: El Dioscorides renovado* (Barcelona: Labor, 1961), no. 390, 548-550; Diego Rivera Núñez and Concepción Obón de Castro, *La Guía Incafo de las Plantas Útiles y Venenosas de la Península Ibérica y Baleares* (Madrid: Incafo, 1991), no. 247, 827–8.
14. Apollodorus, 1. 100, 27. Despairing of his son's return and also to avoid being murdered by his brother Pelias, Jason's father Aeson requested to take his own life with a draft of blood from a slaughtered bull.
15. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), chapter

four: “Jason, the Drug Man.”

16. Mark Hoffman and Carl A. P. Ruck, “Addendum: Turner’s Vision of Medea”: 63–76, in *Entheos*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2002). As with the name of “Mithra’s plant” (*Mehr giad*) for mandrake as a love potion, Medea’s plant might also be mandrake. See Raymond J. Clark, “A Note on Medea’s Plant and the Mandrake”: 227–31, in *Folklore*, vol. 79, no. 3 (Autumn 1968). Medea first uses it to anoint her lover Jason, and hence it qualifies as an “aphrodisiac,” but the full extent of its mythopoetic involvement with the renowned herbalist suggests that the original was the fungal sacrament.
17. Dioscorides, *Alexipharmaca* 25.
18. Aelian, *De natura animalium*, 11.35.
19. F. Max Müller, *Mitología Egipcia* (Barcelona: Edicomunicación, 1996), 164.
20. Herodotus, 3, 37.
21. On the association of these dwarfish creatures with Soma and fly agaric, see José Alfredo González Celdrán, *Hombres, dioses, y hongos* (Madrid: EDAF, 2002), 33 *et seq.*; Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 164.
22. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 108, 166, 292.
23. Aelian, *De natura animalium*, 5.17.
24. Ibid., 11.8.
25. On the Leucadian Leap, see Ruck, in Wasson et al., *Persephone’s Quest*, 246 *et seq*.
26. Pliny, *Hist. nat*., 10.75; Pausanias, 8.26.7; compare “Fly-hunter,” *muiotheras*, Hesychius.
27. On fly agaric and the Iamid priesthood of Olympia, see Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 46 *et seq*.

Chapter Five

1. A recent study of Classical Greece's receptivity to Persian cultural ideas begins by dismissing any religious syncretism or contamination (Margaret C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study of Cultural Receptivity* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997]. Miller mentions Zoroaster only briefly (8) to indicate Plato's lack of knowledge in considering him a son of Ahura-Mazda (*Alcibiades*, 1. 122a, which is the earliest mention of him in Greek). She argues that Persian-Iranian prisoners from the Persian Wars were probably executed and the main influence was from the material goods taken from them as the spoils of battle. Nevertheless, an Ostanes, which appears, like '"Zoroaster" himself, to be a hereditary priestly entitlement rather than a single person, was said to have traveled with Xerxes as his Magus on his invasion and was entertained in Thracian Andréa by the father of Democritos a century earlier (Pliny, *Hist. nat*. 30.8). And although the army of the Persian Empire was multiethnic and polyglot, Xerxes was accompanied by his elite guard comprised of ten thousand Iranian "immortals," who presumably were initiated into the Achaemid warrior cult of the Saka Haomavarga. Miller makes no mention of the *haoma* sacrament. In enumerating the resident foreigners and slaves, among them many from Anatolia and beyond, with their imported cults, which all appear to involve ecstatic rituals, she mentions the deities Bendis, Adonis, Sabazios, Ammon, and Isis.
2. Pausanias (ca. 150 CE), *Description of Greece*, 2.16.3: the scabbard is also called a *mukes*, so-called because it resembled a mushroom; and the penis was also called a mushroom metaphorically; they are all variants of the same event. See "Perseus, the Mushroom Picker": 41–85, in see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000). Cf. Stephanus of Byzantium, s.v. *Mukenai*.
3. Alexander Herda, "Panionion-Melia, Mykalessos-Mykale, Perseus und Medusa: Überlegungen zur Besiedlungsgeschichte der Mykale in der frühen Eisenzeit": 43–102, in *Istanbuler Mitteilungen*, vol. 56 (2006). The word *gorgon* seems to be derived from the Sanskrit root *garg* for a guttural "gurgling" sound. See Thalia Phillies Howe, "The Origin and Function of the Gorgon-Head": 209–221, in *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 58, no. 3 (July 1954).
4. *Chronographia*, in *Corpus scriptorum historicorum Byzantinorum*, L. Dindorf (ed.), 35–9; the same account is picked up by John of Antioch, *Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum IV*, C. Muller (ed.), John of Antioch, 539–44, frag. 1.8, 6.10, 6.8.
5. *Migne Patrologia Graeca*, 121.
6. Marguerite Rigoglioso, "Persephone's Sacred Lake and the Ancient Female Mystery Religion in the Womb of Sicily": 5–29, in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Fall 2005).
7. A recent book devoted solely to the subject of the hero Perseus continues the prejudice of Classical scholars toward the subject of entheogens by ignoring the significance of the mushroom. This vase is cited as *LIMC* (i.e., H. C. Ackerman and J. R. Gisler eds., *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich: Artemis, 1981–99, no. 62); but there is no mention of the mushrooms, even though attention has been directed to their significance for over a third of a century. Daniel Ogden, *Perseus* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008). Although Pausanias's account of Perseus and the mushroom at Mycenae is cited, the "mushroom" itself was too unimportant to be listed in the book's index.
8. Stephen Wilk, *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Wilk merely mentions, without explanation, that "perhaps Perseus is Mithras, right down to the weapon," 241.

9. From an article on mushrooms by N. Angelis in the Greek newspaper *Eleftheria*, 1962, translated by Georgacas: "On the pine trees and on the sacred olive there grow some big red mushrooms with a terrible poison … The shepherds wonder: How does it come about that the olive tree produces bad mushrooms?"
10. The wings on the cap emphasize its "magical qualities": see David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised paperback 1991), 28. Ulansey, however, is blind to the mushrooms and to the olive as annotations of the botanical agent, and of course, is equally blind to the shield as a mushroom cap on the stipe of the olive trunk.
11. Aeschylus, *Phorcides* (fragments 261–262, *TrGF*).
12. Homer, *Iliad* 5.844–845.
13. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 58 *et seq*.
14. It is described as *blosuropis* (Homer, *Iliad* 11, 36): compare the gloss of Hesychios: *blosemen* equals *skotothenai*.
15. Ibid., *deinon derkomene*.
16. Aristotle used it to describe the efficacy of harmala, *Problemata* 926b.
17. Thus Perseus's daughter is named for his defeat of the Gorgon as Gorgophone; and Hermes has the epithet of Ageïphontes as the killer of Argos.
18. Rather than "destroy," especially since Perseus destroyed nothing, the Sanskrit root appears to be *bardh-aka-h* for "cut, trim, and prune," which suits Perseus perfectly, as well as Perse/Persephone. See Émile Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Heidelberg/Paris: Klincksieck, 1923, reprint 1950), 771.
19. See Ruck and González Celdrán, "Melusina of Plaincouralut": 309 *et seq*., in Carl A.P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).
20. Ibid., 324 *et seq*.
21. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 156.
22. David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised paperback 1991), 40 *et seq*. See also Joseph Fontenrose, *Python* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1959), 279–80.
23. The martyrdom of San Vicente of Avila similarly involves the tradition of a single footprint, as discussed below.
24. Ruck, in Wasson et al., *Persephone's Quest*, 226; Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 12 *et seq*.
25. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 7 *et seq*.
26. Statius, *Thebaid*, 1.719–20. This is the earliest literary mention (ca. 80 CE) of the Mithraic Mysteries. An elaboration of alternative identities for Apollo as Phoebus or Sun-god concludes with him as the same as the rosy Sun of the Persian (Achaemenid) race, or Osiris, or "Mithras, who beneath the rocky cave or Perseus twists the horns (of the bull) that resists following (him)": *Seu Persei sub rupibus antri indignata sequi torquentem cornua Mithram*. (This makes *Mithras* the final word of book one.) The *Persei* could also mean either "Perseus" or the adjective "Persian" (named after the son of Perseus as mythical ancestor of the race). The mention is intricate and would be incomprehensible to someone not initiated. This means that if Nero was indeed the first, within a decade and a half the religion had become entrenched within the military, at least, which was the background of the poet's imperial patron Domitian.
27. See Ulansey, *Origins of Mithraic Mysteries*, chapter 3: "Mithras and Perseus," 25–39, who cites Franz Cumont, "Rapport sur une mission à Rome": 418, in *Academie des inscriptions et belles-*

lettres rendus, 1945.

28. See V 1283.7 and 10: relief from Neuenheim that couples Atlas holding the celestial globe and the rock birth of Mithras holding the globe.
29. See Clark Hopkins, “Assyrian Elements in the Perseus-Gorgon Story”: 341–358, in *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July–September 1934).

Chapter Six

1. Plato, *Symposium*, 186 *et seq*.
2. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 176 *et seq*.
3. Marvin W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 118.
4. Sir James George Frazier, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* (Whitefish, MT: Kessiniger Publishing, 2003, original 1906), 281 *et seq*.
5. Driven there with frenzied madness, wandering of mind, with flint's sharp edge he dropped his little dumbbell, then realized his limbs no longer had his guy. *Stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, uagus animis, deuolsit ili acuto sibi pondera silice, itaque ut relicta sensit sibi membra sine uiro*.
   —Catullus, 63, 4 *et seq*.
6. Sir James Frazier, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: New American Library, abridged, 1961, original unabridged 1890), chapter 35.
7. Pausanias 2.19.10.
8. Aelian, *De natura animalium* 9.21.
9. Pliny, *Hist. nat*., 22.96.
10. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 120 *et seq*.; John Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 73 *et seq*.
11. *Maqlu*, 6.37–40; R. Campbell Thompson, A *Dictionary of Assyrian Botany* (London: The British Academy, 1949), 262 *et seq*.
12. Arnobius Afer, *Adversus nationes*, 5.5–8. M. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult* (London: Thames, 1977).
13. Arnobius Afer, 5.6; see Alfred Loisy, *Les Mystéres païens et le mystére chrétien* (Paris: Nourry, 1914).
14. Jeremy B. Ritter, "The Three Phases of the Taurobolium": 226–249, in *Phoenix*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Autumn 1968).
15. Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 10.101 *et seq*.
16. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, VI, 510–512, dated 376 CE, during the pagan revival and probably as a challenge to Christianity.
17. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.15.
18. Numbers, 17.8–11, 20.7–13.
19. Gospel of James, 9.
20. Peter A. Michas, Robert Vander Maten, and Christie Michas, *The Rod of an Almond Tree in God's Master Plan* (Mukilteo, WA: Wine Press Publishing, 1997).
21. Exodus, 4.20–21.
22. For a comprehensive survey of other examples, see Fulvio Gosso and Gilberto Camilla, *Allucinogeni e Cristianesimo: Evidenze nell'arte sacra* (Milan: ORISS-SISSC, 2007). See also Carl A.P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), chapters 2 and 12.
23. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 350, 372 *et seq*.
24. Jonathan Ott, "Carved 'Disembodied Eyes' of Teotihuacán": 141–142, in R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrish, Jonathan Ott, and Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); R. Gordon Wasson, *Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 161–168.

25. See Marius Schneider, *El origen musical de los animales-simbolos en la mitología y escultura antiguas* (Barcelona: Ediciones Siruela, 1946).
26. Matthew, 27.51–53; compare: Mark, 15.38; Luke, 23.45.
27. See Gonzáles Celdrán and Ruck, "The Heavenly Banquet": 363 *et seq*, in Ruck et al., *Hidden World*.
28. John, 19.28–37.
29. See José Alfredo González Celdrán and Carl A. P. Ruck, "Daturas for the Virgin": 49–74, in *Entheos* vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 2001) specifically 68 *et seq*.
30. Mark, 15.23.
31. Disocorides.
32. See Charles Picard, "Dionyos Mitrephoros": 707–721, in *Melanges Gustave Glotz*, II (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1932).
33. Gail Tatham, "*Ariadne's Mitra: A Note on Catullus* 64.61–4": 560–561, in *The Classical Quarterly*, n. s., vol. 40, no. 2 (1990).
34. The *skyphos* or "skull-cup" was supposedly derived from the head of the Gorgon Medousa, used as a drinking vessel, on which below. Although the attestation for that tradition is late, the earliest depiction of the Gorgons (Eleusis *amphora*, by the so-called Polyphemus painter, early seventh century) depicts them as "cauldron-heads," from which it is assumed their round vessel-shaped heads, in fact, were derived.
35. *Ca*. 450–350 BCE, in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens. See fig. 29, in David Walsh, *Distorted Ideals in Greek Vase-Painting: The World of Mythological Burlesque* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Chapter Seven

1. On the use of masks for the seven grades, see Jerome, *Epistula ad Laetam*, 107.
2. Christian commentator Ambrosiaster (Pseudo-Ambrosius), *Quaestiones veteres novi testimenti*, 114.11. He is called Ambrosiaster because his commentaries are usually published among the works of Saint Ambrose.
3. *Scriptores historiae Augustae*, Lampridius, *Commodus*, 9.
4. See M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963, originally *Mithras de geheimzinnige God*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1959), 166 *et seq*.
5. Paul, Romans, 6.11, as amplified by Saint Basil the Great, *Oration on the Holy Spirit*, 35.
6. Published by H. G. Horn, "Das Mainzer Mithrasgefäss": 21–66, in *Mainzer Archäologische Zeitscrift*, vol. 1 (1994).
7. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 125 *et seq*.
8. Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 30.
9. Roger Beck, "Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel": 145–180, in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 90 (2000). "I baptize you with water; but the one who comes after me is mightier than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."—Matthew, 3.11. Compare Mark, 1.8; Luke, 3.16; John, 1.26, 33.
10. R. L. Gordon, "Reality, Evocation, and Boundary in the Mysteries of Mithras": 19 *et seq*., in *Journal of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 3 (1980).
11. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1964), 260, following Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Chicago: Open Court, 1903, originally published as *Texts et monuments figurés relatif aux mystères de Mithra*, Brussels: Lamartin, 1896–9), 180–1.
12. V 844: I. A. Richmond and J.P. Gillam, "The Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh": 51, in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 51 (1951).
13. Elmar Schwertheim, *Mithras: Seine Denkmäler und sein Kult*, in *Antike Welt*, Sondernummer 10 (1979).
14. Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum*, 6 (Euboulos).
15. Homer, *Iliad*, 24.443.
16. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 9.806 *et seq*.
17. Strabo, 11.13.11.
18. See V 37, illustrated below. This is the usual placement of the raven, either aiming at the cap or perched upon the sky mantle: compare V 1902, 1906, 1907, 1920, 1924, 2000, 2001, 2073, 2168, 2171, 2196, 2198, etc. *Sol* also sometimes acts to inform Mithras of his bull-slayer task.
19. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 121–2.
20. Hence the portrayal of the Winds in the iconography of the tauroctonies.
21. Compare the eagle grade in Kurdish Mithraism. See also Mark Hoffman, Carl A. P. Ruck, and Blaise Daniel Staples, "Conjuring Eden": 13–50, in *Entheos: Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Summer 2001) on the eagle-raven and Mesopotamian kingship.
22. See Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 221 *et seq*.; Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), 170 *et seq*.
23. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 201.
24. Russians sent to Siberian work camps in forestry in the 1930s attributed their survival under the adverse conditions to the availability of "bread raven" and "raven's bread," whose intoxication apparently made the situation bearable, comparing it to Elijah's nourishment in the desert. See

Aron A. Toews and John B. Toews, *Mennonite Martyrs: People who Suffered for their Faith, 1920–1940* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1990), 235.

25. Christian Rätsch, *Enzyklopädie der psychoaktiven Pflanze* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998).
26. Christian Rätsch, *Dictionary of Sacred and Magical Plants* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1992), 83.
27. See Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, chapter 5; Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, chap. 2.
28. 1 Kings, 17.1 *et seq*.
29. V 1045; 1211.
30. V 593, the earliest dateable representation. The tail of the bull is missing so that it is not possible to know whether the grain grew also from there.
31. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 287, 304. On the Armenian Mithras arch-giant myth with raven and manna, see Ilya Gersheueitch, "Die Sonne das Beste": 85–89, in *Journal of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 1 (1976).
32. Two inscriptions from a Roman Mithraeum, dated 358 and 363, refer to *Cryfii* or *Chryfii*. There is no reason to interpret the *Kryphios* as children below the age of initiation, representing the future hope of the brotherhood. The *Cryfii* are also probably not a special grade of Mithraists who have gone into hiding, as suggested by Nabarz (*Mysteries of Mithras*, 67).
33. V 268, 1.
34. So used also in English. Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 551b2, 555a3.
35. John, Revelation, 19.5 *et seq*.
36. Herodotus, 1.131.
37. Firmacus Matericus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, 19.1.
38. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 183 *et seq*.
39. See Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).
40. See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1980, reprint of Cambridge, MA: Harvard Universtiy Press, 1978), 202–3 (ambivalently hidden away in a footnote, but with an indication of its archetypal or cross-cultural occurrence).
41. Beck, "Ritual," incomprehensively claims (146) that the term *Nymphus* cannot be translated since it "is a non-word for a non-thing," a "male-bride," following the opinion of Gordon, "Reality," 19–99. Now, it does seem that Gordon and Beck might have used a little imagination! Nabarz is equally naive in waxing eloquent about the useful "celibacy" of the *Nymphus* in the all-male military environment. Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 114.
42. Roman graffito. Not only is this a purification rite, this anointing may parallel the sympathetic (fungal) magic of Krishna worshippers who anoint cow-dung statuettes of Krishna with milk. The *Nymphus* grade probably goes back to Indo-European *linga* worship, i.e., "'pouring out" upon Mithras as phallus.
43. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem first used the "soldier of Christ" metaphor for Confirmation in his Easter sermon of 350 CE, also employing the ritual slap on the face of the initiate. The Church traces the sacrament back to the Pentecostal descent of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 2.1–41. This was later to emerge as the medieval cult of knighthood, founded to perpetuate the military orders of the Crusaders.
44. Tertullian, *De corona*, 15.
45. John, 18.36.
46. V 480.5.

47. See Richard Frye, "Mithra in Iranian History": 62–67, in J.R. Hinnells, ed., *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 62.
48. Tertullian, *De praescriptiones* 40: (*Mithras) signet illic in frontibus milites suos* ("Mithras brands his soldiers on the forehead"). What may be the text of the liturgy for the Soldier's initiation survives: W. M. Brashear, *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt* (P. Berol. 21196), (Vienna: Adolf Holzhaosens, 1992). Caution, however, is called for in reading Tertullian's account of branding, since paintings of the higher grades of initiation don't show the branded mark; Breskon (in Bianchi 487–501) rejects the practice in Mithraism (*Mithraic Conference*, 32). Tertullian interpreted this sign as the mark of the Devil; see Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
49. The earliest mention of Ash Wednesday as *dies cinerum* is by the eight-century Anglo-Saxon abbot Aelfric in his *Lives of the Saints*. He suggests that it has precedent in the Old Testament in Job 42.6 and elsewhere. Its origin, however, is from Vedic India, where the ashes are the seed of the fire god Agni, and it was practiced in ancient Rome as the New Year Feast of Atonement when people bathed in ashes. This followed the *dies Martis*, the carnival of Tuesday or Mars's Day, now known as Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras.
50. Ludovisi sarcophagus, third century, now in the palazzo Altemps in Rome, from a tomb near the Porta Tiburtina; its lid shows barbarians submitting to Hostilian. Robert Turcan and Antonia Nevill, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, translated from the French by Antonia Nevill (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 244.
51. John, Revelation, 13.15 *et seq.*: "It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that it could speak, and could cause all who would not worship the image to be put to death. Moreover, it caused everyone, great and small, rich and poor, slave and free, to be branded with a mark on his right hand or forehead, and no one was allowed to buy or sell unless he bore this beast's mark, either name or number. (Here is the key; and anyone who has intelligence may work out the number of the beast. The number represents a man's name, and the numerical value of its letters is six-hundred and sixty-six.)" John clearly is proclaiming a puzzle, a challenge, and his phrase "anyone who has intelligence" (*"he who has intelligence, let him vote for the number"*) hints at a mystery or something he dare not name openly. The solution is obviously the ancient magical technique of gematria, where the letters are each assigned a numerical value. In this case it would be the name of someone. But the problem is twofold: we don't know in what language and the text is not secure, since some recently discovered third-century manuscripts give the number 616. In Aramaic, 666 would yield the Emperor Nero, who was probably John's contemporary. Although Irenaeus knew of the 616 variant, he dismissed it as an error, but the earliest papyrus fragment of Revelation reads 616. Nero, depending on how it is spelled and with which title, could also yield 616. So could Caligula, depending on titles, in both Aramaic and Greek. Similarly, the traditional abbreviation for Domitian with titles yields 666 in Greek. What is clear, however, is that gematria as a Babylonian technique yielded the magical square of the sun. (A square, with six digits per side, contains the numbers one to thirty-six, so arranged that the sum in any direction row, column, or diagonal is 111, and whose total sum is 666.) Possession of this magical square, which was often carried as a talisman, was considered a heresy after the Conversion. In Babylonia, this square was a symbol of the solar lion. Nabarz suggests its association with the Mithraic Mysteries (Narbarz, *Mysteries of Mithras*, 35), following the argument presented in Walter O. Moeller, *The Mithraic Origin and Meanings of the Rotas-sator Square* (Leiden, Brill Archive, 1973). Christians were able to compute a number for the Risen Jesus and impose it on the square of the sun, so that the intersecting diagonal yielded the X, which they interpreted as the *chi* as the initial of the Christ.
52. V 191.

53. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 11.22: *Mithram illum suum sacerdotem praecipuum*; 11.25: *Mithram sacerdotem et meum iam parentem*.
54. Marcellinus (died 34) was the first bishop of Rome to assume the primacy as Pope.
55. Jonathan Ott, "Carved 'Disembodied Eyes' of Teotihuacán,"141–148, in R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrish, Jonathan Ott, Carl A. P. Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).
56. Identified as a ring in M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), 152; and as a *patera* or libation platter by the same author in V 299; so also Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 313; Manfred Clauss, *Mithras; Kult und Mysterien* (München: C.H. Beck, 1990), 144; Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein: Hain, 1984), 295.
57. V 326.
58. V 49.
59. V 44.
60. On the fungal significance of the eggshell caps of the Dioskouroi, see Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 121–125.

Chapter Eight

1. See (Swami) Sri Yukteswar (Giri), the monastic name of Priyanath Karar, *The Holy Science* (Los Angeles, CA: Self Realization Fellowship, 1998, originally published 1894).
2. V 1247, B 2.
3. V 1283.
4. V 42.2–3: fresco from Dura-Europos; V 390.1: tauroctony fresco from the Palazzo Barberini Mithraeum; V 491: statue base from Santa Prisca Mithraeum; V 650.1: tauroctony relief from San Silvestro; V 667: head of dying giant from Florentia; V 720: altar base from Angera; V 723.3: relief from San Zeno; V 966.B2: tauroctony relief from Pons Saravi; V 183.A15: tauroctony relief from Heddernheim; et cetera.
5. V 1123: relief from Heddernheim III; et cetera.
6. V 695: marble relief from Mutina or Rome; V 475: Greek inscription from Rome, dedication by a Father and priest to Zeus-Helios-Mithras-Phanes; V 860: relief from Housesteads.
7. See Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1942), 74–76.
8. Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, 21.247, 40.399; Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatif aux mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamertin, 1896, 1899), vol. 1, 177, note 2.
9. Geminus Rhodius (astronomicus), *De astronomia*, 1.34.
10. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.1 *et seq*.
11. Plato, *Phaedo*, 84c5 *et seq*.
12. Carl A. P. Ruck and Blaise Daniel Staples, *The World of Classical Myth: Gods and Goddesses, Heroines and Heroes* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1994), 108.
13. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), chapter 5, footnote 231, on agarics and spittle, et cetera.
14. David Metzner, presentation at A.C.E. Winter Star Symposium, 1997.
15. Yukia Ustinova, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom: Celestial Aphrodite and the Most High God* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 271.
16. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 210 *et seq*., on the vision of Ezekiel.
17. V 1591: marble altar, from Pannonia. Behind the Charioteer are the heads of the horses of his *quadriga* or chariot.
18. Or a blue aureole with gilt radiant crown: V 480.2: fresco, Santa Prisca Mithraeum.
19. V 299.10.
20. See V 480.1&2.
21. Plato, *Symposium*, 201d–212c. For a discussion of spiritual parenthood, see A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work* (New York: Meridian, 1956, reprint), 224 *et seq*. On Socratic Eros, see Paul Friedländer, *Plato: An Introduction* (New York: Harper, 1958, translated from the German of 1954), 44 *et seq*.
22. Compare the Persian king being given authority by Ahura-Mazda and Mithras. See Roman Girshman, *Persian Art: The Parthian and Sassanian Dynasties 249 BCE–651 CE*, translated by Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons (London: Golden Press, 1962), 190, fig. 233. Mithras holds a barsom and stands upon a lotus or lily.
23. V 1137B, Rückingen: Mithras and *Sol* reclining on a dining couch covered with the bull's hide; V 1247.11, Dieburg: the same scene.
24. See Richard Gordon, "Authority, Salvation, and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras": 45–80, in *Image and Mystery in the Roman World*, three papers in memory of Jocelyn Toynbee (Gloucester, UK: Sutton, 1988), magic carpet on p. 68.

25. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 105 *et seq*.
26. V 641, Fiano Romano: the table is covered with the bull's hide.
27. V 1083B, Heddernheim: Mithras and *Sol* standing behind the slaughtered bull's carcass.
28. Not in V. From Lopodunum, see plate 11 in Gordon, "Authority."
29. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 77 *et seq*.
30. V 42.13, from Dura-Europos: Mithras and *Sol* seated or reclining behind the bull's carcass.
31. Wasson Archives, Harvard Botanical Libraries.
32. Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, 1.86.
33. Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96.
34. See J. P. Kane, "The Mithraic Cult Meal in its Greek and Roman Environment": 313–51, in *Mithraic Studies*, Hinnells, ed., (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1975).
35. Wasson Archives, Persian file, Harvard Botanical Libraries, notes from Henzi Massé, *Persian Beliefs and Customs*.
36. *Apocryphal Book of Enoch*, mid-end of second century BCE, 7.1 *et seq.*; compare Genesis 6 *et seq*. See Mark Hoffman, Carl A. P. Ruck, and Blaise Daniel Staples, "Conjuring Eden": 13–50, in *Entheos: Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality*, vol. 1 no.1 (Summer 2001) 13–14.
37. Carl A. P. Ruck, *Sacred Mushrooms of the Goddess: Secrets of Eleusis* (Oakland, CA: Ronin Publishing, 2006), 66 *et seq*.
38. Compare the role of Dionysus as a god poured as offering to the gods: Euripides, *Bacchae*, 284–85, see Alfred Loisy, *The Birth of the Christian Religion* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, Inc, 1962, translated from the French edition of 1933); Anne Katrine Gade Kristensen, *Who were the Cimmerians?* (Copenhagen: Poul Lindegard Hjorth, 1988).
39. Matthew, 26.39; Mark, 14.36; Luke, 22.42.
40. Matthew, 26.29; Mark, 14.25; Luke, 22.30.
41. Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 5. A version of Mithras may occur also in Chinese mythology, where he came to be known as the "Friend." Mithras is represented as a military general in Chinese statues, and is considered to be the friend of man in this life and his protector against evil in the next. See David Fingrut, *Mithraism: The Legacy of the Roman Empire's Final Pagan State Religion* (Toronto: SEED Alternative School, high school student essay, 1993, available on the Web), 7. He appears also as the Maitreya Buddha, whose name is derived from the Sanskrit *maitri*, meaning "loving kindness," from the noun *mitra* in the sense of "friend." Maitreya will preside over the world after the final Conflagration in an eternal paradise. Cornelis P. Tiele, *The Religion of the Iranian Peoples* (The Parsi Publishing, 1912, translated from the German), 159. Maitreya sects have fomented numerous messianic rebellions since the sixth century, with the combatants sometimes frenzied with drugs.
42. 2 Kings, 23.11. See Chris Bennet and Richard Cowan, *Sex, Drugs, Violence, and the Bible* (Gibsons, British Columbia: Forbidden Fruit, no date), part 1, 173.
43. Zamyad Yasht, 19.89.
44. V 650L.2.
45. V 350.2.
46. V 729 reverse 2, San Zeno: *Sol* about to strike Mithras with a rock.
47. V 1815.12, Sárkeszi: *Sol* kneeling before Mithras, who holds a bull's shank over *Sol's* head; V 1430C.5, Vorunum: *Sol* with radiant crown kneeling before Mithras and grasping his leg, while Mithras appears about to strike the other with a bull's shank. See Hoffman et al., "Conjuring Eden," 16–17, on Mesopotamian traditions concerning the bull-shank.
48. V 1083A.5.

49. PGM 4.481–702 (Dietrich). The significance of the liturgy for the interpretation of Mithraism was rejected by Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatif aux mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamertin, 1896, 1899), vol. 2, 56. For a reexamination of the importance, see Roger Beck, "Interpreting the Ponza Zodiac II": 87–147, in *Journal of Mithraic Studies* vol. 2, no. 2 (1978); R. L. Gordon, "Mithras' Rindsschulter": 213–219, in *Journal of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1978). Accepted by David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised paperback 1991), 104 *et seq*.
50. Compare this to the seven Rishis or "luminaries" of ancient India, and the seven sages of Greece. These, like the preeminence of the number seven in Eurasian shamanism and its historical religions, can be attributed to the seven visible planets. Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, chapter 5, footnote 75.
51. *Bundahishn* 30.10.
52. V 1083B.
53. V 1137B. Compare the Persian hunting scenes.
54. V 1584.
55. V 42.13: Dura-Europos fresco.
56. V 1496. Compare V 1706, sandstone altar from Carnutum: Raven above a sheaf of grain and serpent.
57. V 1508 (wooden base stand is not original).

Chapter Nine

1. See E.S. Drower, *Water into Wine: A Study of Ritual Idiom in the Middle East* (London: John Murray, 1956).
2. Diogenes Laertius, 8.34 *et seq*.
3. Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 109 *et seq*.
4. John, 6.31-35.
5. V 659, fig. 185 and 186.
6. Aristophanes, *Wasps*, five *et seq*.
7. V 1137 B, upper register; 1247 A, central scene; et cetera.
8. Valerius Maximus 1.3.2; Plutarch, *Symposium*, 4.6. Eugene N. Lee, "Sabazius and the Jews in Valerius Maximus: A Re-Examination": 35–38, in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 69 (1979). On the assimilation of Sabazios into Jewish rites, see Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 148.
9. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, 1.2.16.
10. V 1704.
11. V 2364.
12. V 390.
13. On sacrificial animals (including horses, dogs, et cetera.) in Eurasian and Indo-European traditions see Sarangerel Odigan (Julie Ann Stewart), *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 2000).
14. V 357.
15. V 1283.13; 1247.8.
16. Bundahishn: cited in Vermaseren, *Secret God*, 18, 68.
17. Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 2. Haoma is one of the Yazatas or epithets of Ahura Mazda.
18. See Drower, *Water into Wine*.
19. Carl Kerenyi, *The Heroes of the Greeks* (Southampton, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 221; the episode is extant only in art.
20. Vermaseren, *Secret God*, 78.
21. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanarum religionum*, 5.
22. Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ: The Catalogue of the Exhibition "Seeing Salvation"* (London: National Gallery Company Limited, and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
23. On the shamanic significance of the theft of Geryon's cattle, see Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 256 *et seq*.
24. Commodianus, *Instructiones (Instructions in favor of Christian discipline against the gods of the Heathens*), 1.13.
    Invictus de petra natus si deus habentur
    Nunc ego reticeo; vos de istis date priorem!
    Vicit petra deum, quaerendus est petrae creator.
    Insuper et furem adhuc depingitis esse,
    Cum, si deus esset, utique non furto vivebat.
    Terrenus utique fuit et monstruosa natura,
    Vertebatque boves alienos semper in antris
    Sicut et Cacus Vulcani filius ille.
25. *Rig Veda*, 1.32.2; 1.11.12; 2.12.3.
26. See Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 248–49.

27. Compare the Corycaean Cave on Mount Parnassos: see Ruck et al., *Apples of Apollo*, 27 *et seq*.
28. See Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 218 *et seq*.
29. Hoffman et al., "Conjuring Eden."
30. V 1283.13; 1247.8.
31. V 1083A.1–3; and perhaps another Phrygian cap lying beneath it on the ground.
32. V 435: the columns that flank the tauroctony are directed in the same opposite directions as the torches of Cautes and Cautopates.
33. W. M. Brashear, *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt* (P. Berol. 21196), (Vienna: Adolf Holzhaosens, 1992), 6.
34. V 777, from Mérida.
35. V 695. An inscription (V 696) tells us that Father Felix paid for it; the name of Euphrosyne has been obliterated—a woman, leading to speculation that the relief may originally have belonged to the Orphic cult, since females were excluded from Mithraic cults. Felix is probably a title since the donor of the Ostia mosaic bears the same designation.
36. V 543.
37. V 383.
38. V 326.
39. V 611.
40. V 611; compare V 326, with the eye only on the chest.
41. V 312.
42. V 879, 545, 611.
43. V 314.
44. V 103.
45. V 1298.
46. V 312.
47. V 103, 125, 312, 314, 382, 503, 543, 544, 551, 589, 665, 833, 902, 1123, 1134.
48. V 1136.
49. V 312, 543.
50. V 543, 665, 833, 1326. The scepter may be entwined by a twelve-fold spiral to indicate the pathways of the planets.
51. V 314, 103, 383, 589.
52. V 1123.
53. V 103, 312, 544.
54. V 125.
55. V 382, 543, 551, 665.
56. Clark Hopkins, "The Sunny Side of the Greek Gorgon": 25–35, in *Berytus*, vol. 14 (1965).
57. C. Blinkenberg, "Gorgone et Lionne": 267 *et seq*,, in *Revue Achéologique*, ser. 5, vol. 19 (1924). Early interpretations of the *gorgoneion* commonly saw it as an expression of human zoophobia.
58. V 1123. On the Gorgon and leontocephalic god, see David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised paperback 1991), 30 *et seq*.,116 *et seq*.
59. See Hoffman et al., "Conjuring Eden," 37.
60. Hopkins, "The Sunny Side of the Greek Gorgon."
61. See A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (New York: Biblio and Tannen reprint, 1965), vol. 3, part 1, 805.
62. David Ulansey, "The Eighth Gate: The Mithraic Lion-Headed Figure and the World-Soul": forthcoming in *The Ancient World*.
63. S. Smith, "The Face of Humbaba": 440–42, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 26 (1926).

64. Tablet V in the Akkadian version. The account is fragmentary and even when supplemented by the Hittite version, the narrative of the actual decapitation is missing.
65. V 194, 195. The interpretation of the seal follows Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 131 *et seq*.
66. Adrian Morgan, *Toads and Toadstools* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1995), 111–112.
67. Hoffman et al., "Conjuring Eden," 17.
68. Winterthur Museum, Switzerland, no. 2.364, by the so-called Iobates painter, after a similar vase in Eton College, Windsor, plate 167 #5–6, in A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).
69. Hoffman et al., "Conjuring Eden," 18–19.
70. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 326 *et seq*. The names were later erroneously reversed in the manuscript.
71. V 1430.C3. Compare V 1247.A11, from Dieburg.
72. V 1579.4.
73. 2 Kings, 2.11.

Chapter Ten

1. Porphyry, *De antro nympharum*, 2; Celsus, *apud* Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 22. See David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised paperback 1991), reviving and amplifying the theory presented by K. B. Stark, "Die Mithrasstein von Dormagen": 1–25, in *Jahrbücher des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande*, vol. 46 (1869). Stark's theory was reintroduced into the study of Mithraism by Roger B. Beck in an unpublished paper read at the annual 1976 meeting of the American Philological Association, later summarized in: "Cautes and Cautopates: Some Astronomical Considerations": 1–17, in *Journal of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1977); apparently unaware of Beck's work, Stanley Insler presented the same theory in 1980 at the Second International Congress of Mithraic Studies in Teheran: "A New Interpretation of the Bull-Slaying Motif": 523 *et seq*., in *Homages à Maarten J. Vermaseren*, M. B. Boer and T. A. Edridge, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1978). Beck's paper is now published as chapter 8 in *Beck on Mithraism: Collected Works with New Essays* (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 133 *et seq*.
2. For the identification of Mithras as Orion, see Michael Speidel, *Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God* (Leiden: Brill, 1980).

   Orion is mentioned in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but the full account of the myth derives from the lost *Astronomy* of Hesiod. All of these works, however, are records of an oral tradition much older than the probable eighth-century date of their preservation in writing. And his death via the scorpion has analogues with the Egyptian Set and Horus, and the Mesopotamian scorpion-men of *Gilgamesh*. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 226 *et seq*.
3. Salzburg Plaque and the *Codex Vossianus 79*. For the identification of Mithras as Perseus, see *Ulansey, Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.
4. Plato, *Timaeus* 36c: the universe is constructed out of two circles joined in the form of the letter chi.
5. The exact number is variable since the exact duration is decreasing over time because of an acceleration in the precessional speed. In addition, the zodiacal markers are not of equal dimensions.
6. Nothing of Hipparchos's writings survives directly, although he wrote at least fourteen works. His commentary on the astronomical poem of Aratus was preserved by later copyists. Most of what is known about him comes from references in Ptolemy's *Almagest* (as it is known, from its Arabic translated title), and later commentaries on that work, and from references in Strabo and Pliny the Elder.
7. O. Neugebauer, "The Alleged Babylonian Discovery of the Precession of the Equinoxes": 1–8, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 70, no. 1 (January–March 1950).
8. Michael Rice, *Egypt's Legacy: The Archetypes of Western Civilization 3000–30 BC* (London: Routledge, 1997).
9. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission through Myth* (Cambridge, MA: David R. Godine, 1977).
10. Thus the Platonic and Mayan Great Year is of comparable duration, being the time required for the visible fixed stars and moving planets to return to the point from which they started.
11. This is the basic argument of Ulansey, *Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, which we reject.
12. Plutarch, *Vita Pompeii*, 24.
13. Ulansey, *Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.

14. Roger Beck, “The Mysteries of Mithras: a new account of their genesis”: 115–28, in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 88 (1998).
15. Nowhere does Ulansey even mention the central initiatory sacrament! This is extraordinary since Ulansey has become noted as an exponent of the Entheogenic Revival.
16. See Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), chapter 3.
17. Ulansey (*Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 8) claims that secrecy was not involved in Iranian Mithraism, although the traditions of the ancient Persian religion that survive in various sects, such as the still explicitly and genuine Mithraic Kurdish Yezidis (see Appendix) and the Lebanese Druses, espouse secret initiatory rites. See Bernard H. Springett, *Secret Sects of Syria and Lebanon: A Consideration of their Origin, Creeds and Religious Ceremonies, and their Connection with and Influence upon Modern Freemasonry* (London: Read Books, 2007). An ethnic Yezidi informant in the US tells us that mushrooms are a sacrament in their religion as practiced only about thirty years ago (see Appendix.) We will investigate Christian-Mithraic influences and Mithraic survivals in subsequent works.
18. V 242. See diagram in Roger Beck, “Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel”: 145–180, in *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 90 (2000), 161. Compare Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 55.
19. V 2327, a crude limestone relief from Thrace.
20. W. Lentz, “Some Peculiarities Not Hitherto Fully Understood of ‘Roman’ Mithraic Sanctuaries and Representations”: 358–77, in *Mithraic Studies*, ed. John Hinnells (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1975), vol. 2.
21. V 844.
22. V 1935: lion diving into *krater* next to Cautes with uplifted torch held in both hands.
23. “If you want to show this [vision] to someone else, take the juice of the herb called *kentritis*, and smear it, along with rose oil, over the eyes of the one you wish; and he will see so clearly that he will amaze you” (Meyer translation). Betz, Hans-Dieter, *The Mithras Liturgy: Text Translation and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag, 2005), verse 775 *et seq*. This part of the text contains the directions for obtaining the cosmic vision. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the plant is psychoactive. This text is the only place where the word appears. Its name is metaphoric for a “sting’” or a “goad,” and hence it is like the stinging estrus applied to the maenadic cow-maiden, especially since the word can also designate the male’s “prick.” Beyond the metaphor, however, the plant is unidentifiable. It grows around mid-April in Egypt. “It is of a single stem, and reddish down to the root, and the leaves are rather crinkled and have full fruit like the tip of wild asparagus.” It is similar to another unknown plant called *talapes*, which is compared to a wild beet. You can test that you have the right plant by smearing its juice on the black tip of an ibis wing, which will cause its feathers to fall off. Whatever its Egyptian identity, it must be given a Persian identity, since one is instructed to use the juice to write a magical formula on the leaf of the fabled *persea* or ‘Persian tree,’ and then lick the letters off the leaf as one walks toward the east, showing it to the light of the rising sun.
24. V 1599.
25. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, probably from a Mithraeum, in Richard Gordon, “Authority, Salvation, and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras”: plate 7, in *Image and Mystery in the Roman World*, three papers in memory of Jocelyn Toynbee (Gloucester, UK: Sutton, 1988).
26. V 84.
27. V 326.

28. *Vendidad*, Fargard 19.30 (the *Vendidad* or *Videvdat* is a collecton of texts included in the *Avesta;* 13.9; *Rig Veda* 10.14.10 *et seq*.
29. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 261 *et seq*.
30. Erica Reiner, "Astral Magic in Babylonia": 1–150, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series, vol. 85, no. 4 (1995).
31. See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992).
32. Ulansey, *Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, 55.
33. Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Chicago: Open Court, 1903, originally published as *Texts et monuments figurés relatif aux mystères de Mithra*, Brussels: Lamartin, 1896–9), 136–37: "useful herbs and plants."
34. V 2120, 2122: limestone statues from Dacia.
35. Euphorion, frag. 14.1 Powell. Other etymologies for Hyas are from *huein* ("to rain") and *hus* ("pig"). James J. O'Hara, "Virgil's Best Reader? Ovidian Commentary on Vergilian Etymological Wordplay": 100–122 in Peter E. Knox, *Oxford Readings in Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
36. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.136–138.
37. Such, at least, is the etymology imposed upon him in Greece. The name may actually derive from Akkadian Uru-anna, as the light of heaven.
38. Orion is mentioned in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but the full account of the myth derives from the lost *Astronomy* of Hesiod. All of these works, however, are records of an oral tradition much older than the probable eighth-century date of their preservation in writing. And his death via the scorpion has analogues with the Egyptian Set and Horus, and the Mesopotamian scorpion-men of *Gilgamesh*.
39. Argol is actually three stars that experience rapid cycles of eclipse.
40. Fred Schaaf, "Sirius": 83–103, in *The Brightest Stars: Discovering the Universe through the Sky's Most Brilliant Stars* (Hoboken, NJ, Wiley, 2008).
41. Homer, *Iliad* 14. 319–20.
42. William Lin Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1955, reprint 1984); Henry Arderne Omerod. *Piracy in the Ancient World: an Essay in Mediterranean History* (Liverpool, UK: University of Liverpool Press, 1924, reprint Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
43. Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 24.
44. Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, and Clark Heinrich, *The Apples of Apollo: Pagan and Christian Mysteries of the Eucharist* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2000), chapter 4, "Jason the Drug Man," 87–142.

Chapter Eleven

1. Sections of this chapter where published as Mark Hoffman and Carl A. P. Ruck, "Freemasonry and the Survival of the Eucharistic Brotherhoods," *Entheos* vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2002). See http://entheomedia.org/Entheos_Issue_3.htm
2. Thanks to Alan Piper for bringing these lines to our attention. The quoted stanza is third of four. Mithras is addressed as God of the Morning, God of the Noontide, and God of the Midnight, and the poem purports to be a Hymn of the XXX Legion: circa 350 AD, published in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 1910. On the pook as fairy creatures, see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 175 *et seq*.
3. D. K. Malloch, *Christ and the Taurobolium: Lord Mithras in the Genesis of Christianity* (Lochan, Scotland: Lochan Press, 2006), 150 *et seq*.
4. David Lingstone, *The Dying God: The Hidden History of Western Civilization* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2002).
5. Gibbons (XXVIII) describes them as continuing under different names and under the pretense of convivial meetings or "drinking parties." Maximus, Bishop of Turin, in the fifth century railed against the ancient religion as still persisting in full force in the vicinity of his city (*Sermo* 63.2, *Sermo* 98.3: in rural areas of the Piedmont, *in campum* "in the country," *extra civitatem* "outside the city"). Similarly in Carthage and Ravenna the continuance of paganism incited the wrath of Augustine of Hippo and Peter Chyrysologos. Mark Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed: Social Environment and Religious Change in Northern Italy, AD 200–400* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175 *et seq*. And the Emperor Valentinian accepted the petition of Praetextatus, his proconsul of Achaea, to allow the Eleusinian rites to continue since they were so essential to the spiritual well being of his Greek subjects. Robert Hewitt Brown, *Stellar Theology and Masonic Astronomy* (1882, reprint Pomeroy, WA: Health Research Books, 1996; San Diego, CA: Booktree, 2002), 105.
6. The sixth-century Celtic bard Taliesen displays a knowledge of Mithraic lore and may even have been an initiate. Artifacts would suggest that the religion was assimilating local customs and had lost its male exclusivity. See Payam Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras: The Pagan Belief that Shaped the Christian World* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions / Bear and Company, 2005), 67; following the proposal of Sir James Frazer that the "Song of the Macrocosm" contains Mithraic elements. See also John Matthews, *Taliesen: Shamanism and the Bardic Mysteries of Britain and Ireland* (Dartford, Kent: Aquarian Press, 1991).
7. The Templo Malatestiano (the tomb of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, 1419–68) in Rimini is decorated with allusions to Neoplatonic allusions to the soul's journey, using the iconography of Porphyry's dissertation on the *Cave of the Nymphs (Odyssey*, 13. 102 *et seq.*), with its Mithraic interpretation. Malatesta was tried in absentia and condemned to hell for, as Pope Pius II claimed: "He has filled [San Franceso] with heathen works so that it looks like a temple, not for Christians but for infidels to worship demons in." See Joscelyn Godwin, *The Pagan Dream of the Renaissance* (Boston, MA/York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2002), 39 *et seq*. The grotto-nymphaeum of the Villa Giulia (1553) in Rome, now the Etruscan Museum, was built for the future Pope Julius III. As Joscelyn says, "One cannot avoid suspicions of an alternative cult surviving 'underground' in the guise of antiquarianism, as a place of escape from institutionalized Christianity. Not, of course, as an organized secret society, but as something called forth by the needs of the collective soul," 149.

8. A. Romanenko, *The Patriarch Chambers of the Moscow Kremlin State Museum and Reserve for History and Culture*, 1994, cited by Anatoly Fomenko, *History: Science or Fiction* (Bellvue, WA: Delamere Resources, 2005, translated from the Russian), vol. 1, 443.
9. Harvey Goldblatt, "Notes on the Text of Ivan Vylenskyji's *Epistle to the Renegade Bishops":* 47–75, in *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1/2 (June 1994), (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University) special issue Ukrainian Philology and Linguistics. The forty martyrs were a group of soldiers who were forced to lie naked on a frozen lake at Sebaste in Lesser Armenia (eastern, lying northwest of the River Euphrates) in the year 320 for having professed Christianity. They were finally canonized in 1970. We might suppose that the soldiers were former Mithraists. One of the guards beheld a supernatural brilliance hovering over the soldiers and immediately converted, taking his place among the forty, to replace one of them who had deserted to enjoy the warm baths on the shore provided for whoever would defect.
10. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 360 *et seq*.
11. See Mark Hoffman, Carl A. P. Ruck, and Blaise Daniel Staples, "Conjuring Eden: Art and the Entheogenic Vision of Paradise": 13–50, in *Entheos* vol. 1, no. 1 (Summer 2001).
12. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1964), 260 *et seq*.
13. See chapter six.
14. Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 362 *et seq*.
15. The Sufis, who trace descent from the teachings of Attar (1119–1220) and his disciple the poet Rumi, claim to be Muslims, but also esoteric Christians. As to whether they had or have a mushroom cult, there is absolutely no doubt that they consider the mystical experience similar to the effect that enthogenic fungi provides, although it is the easy path to a counterfeit experience. In Arabic the root *FTR* describes the "opening up," and vocalized as *FuTR*, it is a word for the mushroom, not as psychoactive, but as something that forces its way up, cleaving through the soil, analogous to the spiritual awakening of the mystical state; whereas the Arabic root *GHRB* is used for the experience of altered perception and for the psychoactive mushrooms. See N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Sufis: Central Asia and Middle East* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002, 84 *et seq*). Traces of Mithraism can also be found in Sufism, according to Nabarz, partially because of the Persian opposition to Arabic dominance around 700 CE. See Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, 38. Sufis use the term *sukr* or "intoxication" for the mystical state, as opposed to *sahw* for the ordinary state of "sobriety." See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 198.

    The Sufi dervishes wear a conical hat, rather than the floppy stocking cap. This is a version of the Phrygian cap (e.g., the head of Zeus-Ahuramazda, from the tomb of Antiochos I of Kommagene at Nemrud Dagh, *ca*. 64–38 BCE; Antiochos himself is similarly attired). In this stiff, pointed form, it became characteristic of medieval witches and wizards.
16. Both the architect and artist Antonio Gaudí and his patron Count Güell were fervent Catholics and Freemasons. There is little doubt, however, that they shared the Catalonian love of mushrooms and had experienced the visions of the *Amanita muscaria*, which influenced fundamental aspects of the artist's constructions. See José Manuel Gómez-Tabanera García, "Para una semiótica de Antonio Gaudí (1852–1926), arquitecto y genio alucinado": 550–68, in *Arte y nuevas tecnologias: X Congreso de la asociación Española de Semiótica*, 2004.
17. The earliest mention of Mithraism in Freemasonry is 1870 in the charter of the Mithras Lodge of Washington D.C., which is mentioned in Garfield's Presidential papers as the Mithras Lodge of Sorrow, whom he addressed, and which is still operating. There have been numerous related Lodges initiated, including the Mehr Lodge, opened in 1990. Apart from Freemasonry itself, popular Mithraic revivalism can be traced to books being published by authors associated with

the Theosophical Society in 1907 and 1913. These include G. R. S. Mead, *A Mithraic Ritual* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing Co) and Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, *Mithraic Mysteries, Restored and Modernized* (Kessinger Publishing Co., 1993, reprint of 1913). The *Ordo Templi Orientis*, founded by Karl Kellner and originally proposed in the 1890s, has as its seventh grade: Grand Councilor of the Mystical Templars—Magus of the Light, Graal Comrade and Theoretical Rosicrucian, Brother of the Light of the Seven Congregations in Asia, Mysteries of the Mithras Cult. See Nabarz, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, 7.

18. Samuel Parr Beswick, *Swedenborg Rite and the Great Masonic Leaders of the Eighteenth Century, or Swedenborg and Phremasonry* (1870).
19. *Item, quod in receptione fratrum dicti ordinis, vel circa, interdum recipiens et receptus aliquando se deosculabantur in ore, in umbilico seu in ventre nudo, et in ano seu spina dorsii … aliquando in virga virili.—Procés*, 1,91. Richard Payne Knight and Thomas Wright, *Two Essays on the Worship of Priapus* (London: Celephaïs Press, 1865), p. 189.
20. Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism: Christianity's Pagan Roots, A Revolutionary Reinterpretation of the Evidence* (Grand Terrace, CA: Gnostic Media, second edition 2009).
21. A small coastal town of the Crusaders in the Levant.
22. The emblem of the skull and crossbones was actually associated with only four pirates of the eighteenth century, although the design was noted already toward the end of the previous century. Pirates traditionally flew black flags to terrorize their prey and it was called the Jolly Roger even with other designs; the flag could also be red, with the implied threat of slaughter.
23. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 27.33. Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: the Myth of Jewish Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 118 *et seq*.
24. *E.g*., Fra Angelico, fresco cycle in the San Marco Dominican Monastery in Florence, *ca*. 1437–1446, Crucifixion with Mary and Skull of Adam.
25. William Wood Seymour, *The Cross in Tradition, History, and Art* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003, reprint of 1898) 114.
26. Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha* (Alhambra, CA: Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, 1984), 43 *et seq*.
27. See Carl A. P. Ruck and Clark Heinrich, "Old Gods in New Bottles: Alchemical Pharmacopoeia": 55–78, in *Entheos*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Summer 2001); Ruck et al., *Hidden World*, 51, 278.
28. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 42, "Under the shadow of the monument of the shouldhavebeen legislator (Eleutheriodendron! Spare, woodman, spare!) to an overflow meetng of all the nations in Lenster."
29. On Rip and the mushroom, see Carl A. P. Ruck, Blaise Daniel Staples, José Alfredo González Celdrán, and Mark Alwin Hoffman, *The Hidden World: Survival of Pagan Shamanic Themes in European Fairytales* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 143. Irving playfully mocks the secret of the Masonic initiate in his *Knickerbocker's History*, chapter XI, where a contemptuous "double thumb to the nose and fingers in the air" ("something mysterious and Masonic") is incomprehensible to the Governor of New Amsterdam, who "was deeply versed in the mysteries of freemasonry" and "had even dabbled in Egyptian hieroglyphics and the mystic symbols of the obelisk." Arthur Rackham's illustrations for *Rip Van Winkle* (1905) identify the intoxicating draught that causes the slumber as *Amanitas*, red with white spots, and in general he follows the Victorian tradition of depicting the hidden world of the fairies with mushrooms.
30. Vera B. McKnight and Roger Tory Peterson, *A Field Guide to Mushrooms, North America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998), p. 303.

31. E. Cobham Brewer, *The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (Philadelphia, PA: Henry Altemus, 1898, reprint New York, NY: Bartleby, 2000); see also Chris Bennett and Neil McQueen, *Sex, Drugs, Violence and the Bible* (Gibsons, BC: Forbidden Fruit Publishing Company, 2000), on the derivation of the maypole from the Asherah poles of ancient Judaism and the ecstatic religions of the Goddess, emblematic of the serpent and the entheogenic sacrament.
32. Robert R. Hieronimus, *America's Secret Destiny: Spiritual Vision & the Founding of a Nation* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1989).
33. Reprinted in Robert Hewitt Brown, *Stellar Theology and Masonic Astronomy* (San Diego, CA: Book Tree, 2002, first published by D. Appleton and Co., 1882).
34. According to Geoff Kibby, editor of *Field Mycology*, citing Cooke (a personal communication to Mike Crowley).
35. Leonidas Gerardis, *A Guide Book to Eleusis*, 28 (Eleusis, 1955 [Reprinted by Cyceon Tales, www.cyceon.gr).
36. Mark Hoffman and Carl A. P. Ruck, "Freemasonry and the Survival of the Eucharistic Brotherhoods": in *Entheos* vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2002).
37. We note that while it was mutually agreed that our informant would remain confidential, he does not consider the revelation of information above to breach of his Masonic vows in any way. Nor are any of the authors of the present work Masons.
38. These are, of course, references to Masonic handshakes. The similarities to the complex of symbols around the Mithraic accord contract—sealed with a handshake between Mithras and *Sol*—is an interesting parallel.

Appendix

1. Closely related grades shared by both religions, though in a somewhat differing ascending order, include: Soldier, Lion, Raven, Persian Sun (Runner), and Father. Only the Nymphus grade seems to be "missing" from the Kurdish grades. Siamak tells us that of the twelve Kurdish grades, the three highest are associated with the Father; the remaining grades in the Persian version include: Bull, Rooster, Peacock, and Eagle.
2. Taufiq Wahby, *The remnants of Mithraism in Hatra and Iraqi Kurdistan, and its traces in Yazidism: The Yazidis are not devil-worshippers* (London: T. Wahby, 1962).
3. W. B. Heard, "Notes on the Yezidis": 200–219, in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 41 (January–June 1911).

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